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Allegiances

THUNDERCLAN

Leader: Bluestar--blue-gray she-cat, tinged with silver around her muzzle.

Deputy: Tigerclaw--big dark brown tabby tom with unusually long front claws.

Medicine Cat: Yellowfang--old dark gray she-cat with a broad, flattened face.

Apprentice, Waterlily (pretty long-haired calico she-cat with amber eyes)

Warriors: (toms, and she-cats without kits)

Whitestorm --big white tom.

Apprentice, Brightpaw

Darkstripe --sleek black-and-gray tabby tom.

Longtail--pale tabby tom with dark black stripes

Apprentice, Swiftpaw

Runningwind--swift tabby tom.

Willowpelt--very pale gray she-cat with unusual blue eyes.

Mousefur--small dusky brown she-cat.

Apprentice, Thornpaw

Graystripe--long-haired solid gray tom.

Apprentice, Brackenpaw

Fireheart--handsome ginger tom.

Apprentice, Cinderpaw

Dustpelt--dark brown tabby tom.

Sandstorm--pale ginger she-cat.

Apprentices: (more than six moons old, in training to become warriors)

Cinderpaw--dark gray she-cat

Brackenpaw--golden brown tabby tom

Swiftpaw--black-and-white tom

Brightpaw--she-cat, white with ginger splotches.

Thornpaw--golden brown tabby tom.

Queens: (she-cats expecting or nursing kits)

Frostfur--beautiful white coat and blue eyes.

Brindleface--pretty tabby.

Goldenflower--pale ginger coat.

Speckletail--pale tabby, and the oldest nursery queen.

Elders: (former warriors and queens, now retired)

Halftail--big dark brown tabby tom with part of his tail missing.

Smallear--gray tom with very small ears. The oldest tom in ThunderClan.

Patchpelt--small black-and-white tom.

One-eye--pale gray she-cat, the oldest cat in ThunderClan. Virtually blind and deaf.

Dappletail--once-pretty tortoiseshell she-cat with a lovely dappled coat.

Brokentail--long-haired dark brown tabby; blind; formerly ShadowClan leader.

SHADOWCLAN

Leader: Nightstar--old black tom

Deputy: Cinderfur--think gray tom

Medicine Cat: Runningnose--small gray-and-white tom

Warriors: Clawface--battle-scarred brown tom.

Littlecloud-- small tabby tom with piercing blue eyes

Wetfoot - gray tabby tom

A*pprentice,* Oakpaw

Stumpytail - brown tabby tom.

Apprentice, Brownpaw

Queens: Dawncloud--small tabby

Darkflower--black she-cat

Tallpoppy--long-legged light brown tabby she-cat.

Newtspeck - is a small black-and-ginger tabby she-cat.

RIVERCLAN

Leader: Crookedstar—a huge light-colored tabby with a twisted jaw.

Deputy: Leopardfur—unusually spotted golden tabby she-cat.

Medicine cat: Mudfur—long-haired light brown tom.

Warriors: Blackclaw—smoky black tom.

Apprentice, Heavypaw

Stonefur—a gray tom with battle-scarred ears.

Apprentice, Shadepaw

Loudbelly—a dark brown tom.

Apprentice, Silverpaw

Silverstream—a pretty slender silver tabby.

WINDCLAN

Leader: Tallstar--a black-and-white tom with a very long tail.

Deputy: Deadfoot--a black tom with a twisted foot

Medicine Cat: Barkface--a short-tailed brown tom.

Warriors: Mudclaw--a mottled dark brown tom

Apprentice, Webpaw

Tornear--a tabby tom

Apprentice, Runningpaw

Onewhisker--a young brown tabby tom

Apprentice, Whitepaw

Queens: Ashfoot-- a gray she-cat

Morningflower--dilute tortoiseshell-and-white she-cat

CATS OUTSIDE THE CLANS

Barley—black-and-white tom who lives on a farm close to the forest.

Blackfoot—large white tom with huge jet-black paws, formerly ShadowClan deputy.

Boulder—silver tabby tom.

Ravenpaw—sleek black cat with a white-tipped tail.

Princess—a light brown tabby with a distinctive white chest and paws—a kittypet.

Smudge--plump, friendly black-and-white kitten who lives in a house at the edge of the forest.

Prologue

Cold gripped the trees across the river side bank. A small, pretty, calico she-kit laid, basking in the sun. Even though it was cold, she had long, winter fur. The cold did not bother her. A large long-haired gray tabby tom padded up to her. His pelt glowed almost transparent and he had stars all across his flank and shoulders. The tom looked confused as he approached her.

The small she-kit got up to her paws and acted beyond her years, greeting the old tom with a slight nod. She was weary of his appearance. He looked like a ghost to her.

"Who might you be?" The gray tabby tom mewed, softly.

"I should be asking you the same." She retorted, narrowing her eyes, shocked that a ghost was able to speak to her.

"I'm Featherwhisker." He voice stayed calm.

"And I'm Lily."

Lily took a step backwards, cocking her head to the side in confusion. "Featherwhisker is quite a name. How did you get that kind of name?" she mewed. She was curious about this tom. She had so many questions she wanted to ask him, but she couldn't overload him—at least not yet.

Featherwhisker curled his plumbing tail over his front paws. "It's my warrior name. Well, my medicine cat name."

"Warrior name?" Lily mewed. "What's a medicine cat? And how are you able to touch me?" She added, not realizing she had asked a mouthful of questions. She twitched her whiskers nervously and waited for his reply.

"Warriors live alongside the forest with four clans. There's ThunderClan, ShadowClan, RiverClan and WindClan." He paused,

looking down at his paws. "And then there's StarClan; which is where I am from."

"StarClan?" her amber eyes widened.

"We are the warrior ancestors. That's why I have stars on my pelt."

Lily stood up straighter and softened her eyes. This tom was definitely not a threat to her. His words only intrigued her. She wanted to know everything about his Clan life. "What are the other Clans like?"

"ThunderClan lives in the forest. They prefer being surrounded by trees. RiverClan is next to the river. They eat fish. WindClan prefers the moors. I don't know how they like the wide open spaces. And then there's ShadowClan. They make so much mischief for the other Clans." He finished.

"So what does StarClan do?"

"StarClan is able to see the future and we let the other Clans know by prophecies."

"Why not just tell them directly?"

"We can't. The clans must live their lives themselves. We cannot control them, but we can warn them of dangers."

Lily widened her eyes again. "So you are a dead?" She mewed, half in question.

"Yes. I was from ThunderClan. I was their medicine cat." He saw her, clearly confused, so he continued, "a medicine cat takes care of the clan by tending to their wounds and illnesses. They are also able to see and speak with StarClan."

Lily couldn't believe what existed beyond her walls. The world opened up her mind and she felt safe with this tom. They talked for what seemed like moons. She didn't know why he had come to talk to her, but perhaps it was apart the plan.

"Can we meet again?" Meowed Lily.

"Of course!" Featherwhisker purred. "I can see you any time and tell you about the clan life." He added, still purring with delight.

Lily nodded her head. "I would love that."

"Featherwhisker." Lily mewed to out loud. She laid in her handmade nest from her no-furs. She yawned then realized she was dreaming. *Were the Clans actually real?* She stared into the distance, then got to her paws and padded to the window sill. She jumped up and looked into it, seeing the outside world for the first time in a new perspective. The trees spread beyond horizon and a lake running through it. She blinked then slipped through the small door flap.

"It has to be real." she mewed, sitting down on the wooden porch. She kept her gaze fixated through the trees which stood just ahead of her. This forest wasn't as dense as Featherwhisker had explained. She thought to herself. "Perhaps it's not true." But she couldn't shake the feeling of what she was told. He said she could see him anytime. Was it true?

She padded back inside when she heard the familiar sound of her food being poured. She couldn't wait to see the silver tom again. If all what was true, then he could answer all her questions.

Chapter One

Waterlily stretched out her paws and yawned. She looked around herself as she scrambled to her paws noticing Yellowfang wasn't in her nest. Brokentail was finally gone from the medicine den and into the elders'. He was healed, but still their prisoner. Waterlily felt safer now that Brokentail was out of the medicine den. She was more at ease. He didn't harm anyone or try to escape. But there was something about him she couldn't trust.

"Waterlily," Yellowfang sounded from the entrance pierced through her ears.

She looked over and saw Yellowfang standing there, her shoulders square and tried to hide herself kneading on the small tuft of grass below her paws. "Cinderpaw is already in the clearing waiting for you." she rasped, then brushed past Waterlily.

Cinderpaw stood tall, her chest puffed out. Her back leg was healed; she stepped down onto it without any pain now. "Cinderpaw," Waterlily called out to her. "I don't need to ask if you're ready for this." she purred sitting down in the clearing, and looking at her she still stood there with pride.

"What do I need to do?" Cinderpaw asked eagerly.

"Why don't you ask, Fireheart." She stepped aside and Fireheart appeared from behind her.

Cinderpaw rounded her eyes with so much excitement Waterlily thought she would burst into tears. "Oh boy, yes!" she screeched, bounding around Fireheart.

"Alright, alright. I can definitely see that you're doing well." he meowed, bounding after her and led her out the gorse tunnel. Waterlily watched as Cinderpaw staggered up the ravine. She only strugged just before getting to the top, but quickly got to her paws and made it her way out behind her mentor.

"It's going to be mighty quiet with her gone." Yellowfang teased, brushing her tail across Waterlily's flank. "Don't worry. She'll be fine." she added, reassuringly.

Waterlily knew she was right. She had no need to fear for her. Fireheart would take care of her. Besides, Tigerclaw was busy heading to Sunningrocks with a patrol to remark the borders. Waterlily headed back inside the medicine den. "I can fetch more moss for the den." Waterlily offered, seeing they only had dried moss left sitting near the pool.

"Sure, you know where to find them." Yellowfang flicked her tail, and began to tidy up the bits of moss left behind as Waterlily took a mouthful of it. She bounded out of the den and turned to toss it in the back where they put all the other dried herbs they could no longer use. She scrambled up the rock wall, digging her claws in as far as she could. Breathing hard, she was glad to see the trees ahead of her and she made her up. She stumbled to her paws, then headed to the far side just before Sunningrocks. *Hopefully I don't run into Tigerclaw*. She quickly thought to herself, leaping over some of the fallen trunks.

She padded down sandy hallow, where the training grounds were for the warrior apprentices. There weren't any training today, both Sandpaw and Dustpaw were out on patrol with Tigerclaw and their mentors. She kept on the path, following the river down to the area where she saw a mountain of moss-covered trees. She scooped up as much as could carry—some in her mouth and back. She couldn't waste her trip here.

She could hear voices in the distance and she pricked her ears as she picked up the last bit in her mouth. The voices were muffled and she had to crane her neck to listen. "Don't make us fight." a tom growled. Waterlily guessed he was from RiverClan. She could only see his gray fur; it was sleek and shiny. Did they swim over there? Waterlily blinked, not able to comprehend what she was seeing. Has RiverClan been invading their territory after all? Waterlily thought for a moment, then remembered how Silverstream had died. Were they here for her?

She gulped then bounded back for home, not thinking twice on if

her thoughts were true or not. She wasn't going to let them find her unguarded. She ran for camp, clinging to the moss in her jaws and hoping none of the moss on her back falls. She didn't want to go back for them if it did. When she made through the gorse tunnel, she stopped and took a few breaths. Looking back, she still had the moss she had collected—every last bit of it. "Oh thank StarClan." She mumbled then calmly made her into camp, passing by Yellowfang and dropping the moss in the back of the den.

"We should be ready." she meowed, noticing Yellowfang glancing over her shoulder.

"It's Greenleaf, Waterlily. Did you dream of some sickness or something?" rasped Yellowfang licking her paw. She bristled her fur, then quickly licked it down again, trying to keep herself cool from the sun beaming down on them.

"Just in case of RiverClan. They scented them on our territory didn't they? We have to be ready for a fight if it happens." she replied.

"True, but let's hope it doesn't come to that." grumbled Yellowfang. Waterlily could hear footsteps pounding from outside the den walls. They were running fast and it was urgent. Waterlily quickly raced to the entrance and watched as Brackenpaw staggered into camp, his shoulder missing some fur.

"Bluestar!" he yowled, gasping for air and collapsed to the ground. Waterlily raced to his side, and pressed her body against his flank. "Breathe, Brackenpaw." she mewed softly.

Bluestar came out of her den, eyes wide with fear as she saw the apprentice lying in the middle of the of the clearing. "What has happened? Can you tell you me?" she meowed, hopefully.

Brackenpaw nodded, "RiverClan is attacking again. We need help." He scrambled to paws once he was able to breathe with ease once more.

"Whitestorm, Willowpelt, Mousefur, go," Bluestar looked at the brown apprentice, "can you fight?"

"Yes. I can lead them too."

"Alright then, let's go." she meowed, leaping down from the den and letting him lead them to the fight.

Waterlily stood back in horror. She didn't mean for this to be a real outbreak. Closing her eyes, she prayed to StarClan they would all be safe and come back with minor injuries. "Oh may StarClan light your paths." she breathed.

Chapter Two

Just as Waterlily had suspected the warriors came back battered and bruised. But all came back and she was glad no one was injured enough they had to stay the night. Just a few patches on Whitestorm and Longtail. Sandpaw and Dustpaw had some fur missing and a few scratches, but they would heal in no time. And Brackenpaw came back with a deep scratch behind his ear. Waterlily lathered some marigold poultice onto it and told him to just make sure not to lick it off.

"It won't taste good." she told him.

"Alright, I won't. Thanks, Waterlily." he purred, then bounded out of the den, his tail held high.

"Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey, gather here beneath the highrock for a Clan meeting." Bluestar called. Her voice rang out though the camp.

Waterlily and Yellowfang padded side by side to the entrance and sat down, both wrapping their tails over their front paws, eyes locked onto their leader.

"How did Sandpaw and Dustpaw do during the battle?" Bluestar scanned the crowd and stops on the huge white tom.

"Sandpaw did very well. Fought like a warrior." he praised glancing at his apprentice. Sandpaw held her head and chest high as the rest of the cats looked over at her.

"Dustpaw did very good too," Darkstripe meowed, standing with pride with his apprentice sitting just beside him. "He too, fought like a true warrior."

Bluestar looked up at silverpelt, the darkness now spreading across the camp as the sun began to seep down through the trees. "Sandpaw, Dustpaw, please come forward." she beckoned them with

her tail. Sandpaw trembled with excitement, padding alongside Dustpaw. Waterlily knew they were overdue for their warrior ceremony. Bluestar kept pushing it back, making them do more assessments. Was she testing their loyalty?

Waterlily was glad she didn't have to do any of the assessments. She would have still been a 'paw' if it weren't for her switching roles. She didn't regret it. She loved being a medicine cat.

"I, Bluestar, call upon my warrior ancestors to look down in this apprentice. She has trained hard to understand the ways of your noble code and I commend her to you as a warrior in her turn." She looked down at the sandy-colored she-cat then continued, "do you promise to uphold the warrior code and to protect and defend this Clan even at the cost of your life?"

Sandpaw raised her head, her eyes shown with pride. "I do."

"Then by the powers of StarClan, I give you your warrior name. Sandpaw from this moment on, you will know as Sandstorm. StarClan honors your courage and loyalty, and we welcome you as full warrior of ThunderClan." The crowd stood silent, still looking up at their leader, as she continued and now looked at Dustpaw—who was standing taller than ever.

"I, Bluestar, call upon my warrior ancestors to look down in this apprentice. He has trained hard to understand the ways of your noble code and I commend him to you as a warrior in his turn. Do you promise to uphold the warrior code and to protect and defend this Clan even at the cost of your life?"

Dustpaw dipped his head proudly and boldly replied, "I do."

"Then by the powers of StarClan, I give you your warrior name. Dustpaw, from this moment on you will be known as Dustpelt. StarClan honors your bravery and eagerness and we welcome as a full warrior of ThunderClan." she finished, leaping down from the highrock.

The two newly appointed warriors licked their leader's shoulder one after another, as the crowd of cats yowled out their new names.

"Sandstorm! Dustpelt! Sandstorm! Dustpelt!"

"Welcome you as full warriors of ThunderClan. You will sit vigil tonight." She finished and dismissed the Clan with a flick of her tail.

Waterlily padded to Fireheart who just a tail-length from heading into the warriors' den. He was already crouched low to the ground when he turned to her as she called out his name, "Fireheart," she mewed, "how did Cinderpaw 's training go?"

Fireheart kept low and turned to face Waterlily. "She did well. She has a lot to catch up on though."

"I thought as much." Waterlily purred, closing her eyes, feeling a wave of pride wash over her.

"Do you think she can do it?" Fireheart's question made Waterlily's heart pound.

She kneaded the tufts of grass below her paws and whisked her tail anxiously. "Of course." She had to believe it. When no else did, she believed she could cure her—which is what she did. Cinderpaw is here because of her.

"She is still naive." Fireheart went on, "but in time, she could very well be the warrior she wants to be."

"How much time do you think?"

Fireheart tilted his head, "Wouldn't you be the one to know that?"

Waterlily pressed her muzzle to his head, "in time" she breathed. She brushed past him and turned to face him. Her eyes rounded, "I don't know when, Fireheart. But I do know that you're a great mentor. You will know when it is time for her to become a warrior."

Fireheart's ear twitched, "Thanks." he purred, then crept through the thick brambles tangled around the entrance. Waterlily glanced back, watching as his tail disappeared through the brambles. Cinderpaw, now on the other side in the apprentices' den, padded up to Waterlily.

"It's going to be weird sleeping in the apprentices' den." she mewed.

"It's been quiet in the den." Waterlily confessed, brushing her thick tail over her flank. "You'll get used to the apprentices' den soon enough." she added with a purr.

Cinderpaw pressed her cheek to Waterlily. "Thank you for giving me my life back."

Waterlily dipped her head. "I was only doing my duty." she mewed, not wanting the praise. She was only doing what she vowed for the Clans.

"You did something what no other cat would do." she pressed, "you saved me. I might have joined StarClan that night. But instead, you gave me a second chance and I can't thank you enough."

Waterlily purred, not able to hide the pride she felt. "You're welcome. Now go. You'll need your sleep. You still have training tomorrow, remember."

Cinderpaw turned and padded into the apprentices' den. Waterlily sat at the entrance of the medicine den, moss hanging overhead, slightly touching the top of her ears. Something still clung to her throat—was Cinderpaw really ready to become a warrior apprentice? She shook her head to clear it. Of course she was. Fireheart said she was. She had to believe in herself and her mentor. *He will know when it is time*. She told herself again.

Chapter Three

Waterlily opened her eyes to the familiar scents of her old home—her twoleg padded to her side, knelt down and rested its huge paw over her belly. She closed her eyes and purred as she felt its warm touch. The warmth lifted as a cold gust of wind drifted her way. She opened her eyes to see the window above her was closed.

She got to her paws, blinking at it. Looking down, she could see there was a tiny slit—big enough for her to escape if she tried. She looked back at the twoleg. It was busy sitting in the other part of the den. It wasn't closed off like the ones in camp. The entrances were wide and open. Not even the twoleg had to duck to get through them.

Waterlily looked back out the window. The small forest lay before her. Why was she dreaming of her old life as a kittypet? Did she want to go back to her old life? She squeezed through the small opening and left without thinking twice.

She blinked open her eyes, now back in the medicine den. The scent of herbs filled her nostrils. Yellowfang was sleeping a fox-length away, her sides heaving up and down.

Her thoughts returned to her dream. It clawed at her belly. She didn't want to return to the kittypet life. She loved ThunderClan. *Don't be so mouse-brained*. She told herself. *It was just a dream. Not all dreams mean something*. She scrambled to her paws and padded to the entrance of the den.

It was just before dawn. *The sun should be coming up any time now*. She thought. She flicked her gaze through the trees, the sunlight weaved between them, rising slowly above the horizon. Sandstorm and Dustpelt were still sitting silently for vigil, their tails twitching anxiously.

"It's alright. You may talk now." Came the voice of Tigerclaw as he padded to the two newly appointed warriors.

Waterlily didn't see or hear him, startled she blinked glancing from the direction he came. "That was a long night." Sandstorm complained.

"Luckily we have to do it only once." purred Dustpelt, yawning.

It was now dawn and the rest of the cats emerged out into the clearing. Whitestorm, Runningwind and Darkstripe were out first. Whitestorm shook out his thick fur and stretched just before sitting down next to Tigerclaw.

"You lead the patrol down to Snakerocks. I'll head to Sunningrocks." ordered Tigerclaw, twitching his tail tip.

Whitestorm got to his paws and dipped his head. "Very well. Darkstripe, Runningwind, with me." He bounded up the ravine with the two warriors on his heels. Tigerclaw sat in silence for a moment, not noticing Waterlily's presence as she sat near the highrock. Once they were out of the sight, Tigerclaw headed up the hill without anyone else.

Waterlily thought it was rather odd. Why would he tell Whitestorm he's taking a patrol down to Sunningrocks? Was he lying? She crouched down and padded after him, making sure to stay upwind. She had to stay low and out of sight.

Tigerclaw headed down stream and followed the river leading to Sunningrocks. Waterlily kept several fox-lengths behind him, slipping between the trees whenever he slowed to sniff the air. The river rushed beside her, swollen from the recent rains; its steady roar helped to hide her pawsteps.

Roots twisted through the damp earth, forcing Waterlily to watch where she placed her paws. A loose stone tumbled beneath her paws and she froze, eyes wide with fear, her heart jolting as the rock rolled into the water.

Tigerclaw stopped, pricked his ears and slowly turned his head. Waterlily dropped flat behind a clump of ferns, hardly daring to peek through the leaves as he began to open his jaws and taste the air.

He narrowed his amber eyes, then went on his way. Waterlily let out a sigh of relief, noticing she had been holding her breath. She waited until his tail disappeared around the bend before following him once again. The trees thinned ahead and sunlight spilled onto her fur.

The thick covering of leaves gave way to patches of stone and course grass. Through the trunks ahead she caught glimpses of the sparkling river beneath the sun. Soon, the great smooth stones of Sunningrocks appeared along the bank.

Waterlily slowed, and hid herself behind the tall grass. She flattened herself, but kept a watchful gaze on the deputy. Tigerclaw didn't seem to the be patrolling the border like he said. Waterlily narrowed her eyes as another scent drifted towards her.

Tigerclaw suddenly veered away from the river. Waterlily quickly ducked behind an oak and watched him disappear into a patch of bracken. Her whiskers twitched with unease. Whatever he was up to, he clearly didn't want Whitestorm—or any other cat—to know about it.

She crept forward, scenting the smell of cat to be even stronger now. Except this cat wasn't Tigerclaws. It wasn't one she had recognized. She opened her jaws, drawing the scent over the roof of her mouth. Her fur prickled.

She strained forward, trying to see the other cat through the undergrowth. All she could make out was a pair of paws and the occasional flick of a tail. She pressed herself flatter to the ground, and pricked her ears.

"...can't keep doing this." the stranger hissed.

Waterlily ears shot forward. *Doing what?* She thought. She edged closer. "You do as we agreed." Tigerclaw growled.

Waterlily's stomach twisted. *What he was planning*? She widened her eyes, and took a step forward. A twig snapped beneath her paws and every hair on her pelt rose in fear. The voices stopped. Waterlily didn't move. Not even an itch could make her move now.

For a heartbeat, the forest seemed to fall completely silent.

"Who's there?" Tigerclaw broke the silence. Waterlily kept still, holding her breath.

"It was probably just a squirrel." rasped the stranger.

Tigerclaw flicked his tail impatiently. "We'll meet again next quarter moon." Waterlily quickly slipped away undetected and sprang toward Tallpines. She would pretend to be collecting herbs. Surely Tigerclaw wouldn't suspect a medicine cat was ease dropping if she had herbs with her.

Chapter Four

Waterlily didn't stop until the sounds of the river had faded behind her. She slowed as the tall pines came into view, their needles cushioning the ground beneath her paws. Her heart hammered against her chest. *Herbs. I need herbs*. She frantically looked around. She couldn't return carrying the first plant she saw. Tigerclaw might know enough about herbs to realize she was lying.

Waterlily lifted her nose and breathed in. The sharp scent of juniper caught her attention. She hurried toward the bush and began tugging berries free dropping them onto a broad leaf; her paws still trembling. *We'll meet again next quarter moon*. The words wouldn't leave her mind. Who had Tigerclaw been speaking to? She hadn't recognized the voice. She hadn't even gotten a proper look at the cat.

A twig snapped behind her. Waterlily spun around. Tigerclaw stood several fox-lengths away. His amber eyes moved from her to the berries at her paws. "Waterlily?" he hissed.

"Tigerclaw." she forced her fur to lie flat as she padded closer to him, picking up the bundle.

"What are you doing out here?" he questioned her.

Waterlily stared at him. Was he suspicious. Surely he didn't know it was her who had been watching. She cleared her throat and spoke through her closed jaws, gripping onto the herbs, "What does it look like?"

For a few heartbeats neither cat spoke. Waterlily swallowed hard. She itched to leave to hide her fear, but she kept still. Tigerclaw finally broke the silence with a low growl, "You seemed jumpy is all."

"I heard something in the bracken earlier." she shrugged, hoping the movement looked more convincing than it felt. "Probably a mouse,

but it nearly scared the fur off me."

Tigerclaw said nothing. Waterlily could feel his stare burning into her back. She swallowed again. He sneered and curled his lip, "You'd think a medicine cat would know the difference between a mouse and an enemy warrior."

"Herbs don't usually sneak up on me." she gritted her teeth. Tigerclaw's gaze remained fixed her for another moment before turning away.

"Are you heading back to camp?" he meowed, glancing over his shoulder. She nodded, not wanting to speak anymore in case she dropped the berries. "Good, we can return together."

Waterlily's heart sank. It dropped down to her paws making her feel heavy. She padded beside him, keeping up with his pace. By the time the thorn barrier surrounding the camp came into view, her jaws ached from gripping the leaf so tightly. Tigerclaw pushed through the entrance first. Waterlily followed.

The camp had fully awakened while she was gone. Apprentices hurried between the dens while warriors gathered near the fresh-kill pile. Waterlily spotted Yellowfang outside the medicine den sorting through a bundle of leaves.

Whitestorm approached them, his eyes locked onto Tigerclaw. "Anything at Sunningrocks?"

Waterlily brushed past them pretending not to notice, though she was suspicious about the fact Whitestorm didn't ask about him coming back alone. Tigerclaw didn't hesitate to reply. "Nothing unusual."

Waterlily's heart gave a heavy thump, almost dropping the herbs. He had lied. To the whole ThunderClan once again and they trusted him. Waterlily lowered her gaze and she padded closer to Yellowfang. She dropped the herbs at her paws and began picking out the berries.

"I thought we could use more." she mewed.

Yellowfang grunted then got up to go put away the herbs she sorted. "We had plenty." she grumbled.

Mouse-dung. She couldn't tell her the real reason. She wouldn't understand—for she too, probably trusts Tigerclaw. Waterlily glanced up at Yellowfang. She was busy separating the dried leaves with careful sweeps of her paw.

Waterlily let out a quiet breath and continued picking the berries from their stems. Her gaze wondered across the clearing. Tigerclaw had joined Darkstripe near the fresh-kill pile. The two warriors spoke as casually as if nothing unusual had happened that morning. *We'll meet again next quarter moon*. Waterlily dug her claws into the moss.

She should tell someone. Her eyes drifted toward the medicine den. Yellowfang would believe her—wouldn't she? But what would Waterlily even tell her—she had followed Tigerclaw into the forest and overheard half a conversation with a cat she couldn't identify? She didn't know what they had agreed to. She didn't know what Tigerclaw was planning. All she knew for certain was he had lied.

Waterlily looked back toward them. Her pelt prickled. Perhaps it was better to wait. She would follow him again next quarter moon. But this time, she'll be more prepared.

"Waterlily, are you done yet with those berries?" hissed Yellowfang, calling from deep inside the den. "We still need to go through the other herbs. It's inventory, remember." she reminded her.

Waterlily returned her gaze to Yellowfang and nodded her head. "Of course. Sorry." She picked the bundle of berries and padded to the shelves full of herbs. The medicine den filled her nostrils with different scents, washing away the bitter thoughts in her head. She carefully placed the bundle onto the shelf next to the horsetail, then turned to see Yellowfang counting the poppy seeds.

Waterlily walked closer to her and picked out a few piles to count. She pawed first at the comfrey, counting softly in her head.

"Where did you really go?" Yellowfang rasped between counting.

Waterlily looked up and froze. *How did she know?* She looked down at her paws and shuffled them awkwardly. Would Yellowfang even believe her if she told her the truth? If Tigerclaw really was planning something, she had no idea who the stranger was. She had no proof of what Tigerclaw was saying was true. And she surely couldn't tell her about sneaking out again next quarter moon.

She took a deep sigh then finally mewed, "To Sunningrocks to collect more herbs."

Yellowfang stopped counting and glanced over at her with narrowed eyes. "Waterlily. You knew we had enough juniper. What distracted you?"

Waterlily sighed again and met her mentor's yellow gaze. "I overheard Tigerclaw and another cat speaking." she confessed.

Chapter Five

"What did you hear?" Yellowfang's voice cracked with age.

"I don't know." she lied. She couldn't tell her. At least not yet. "I couldn't really hear. But I didn't want to be caught, so I grabbed the first thing I saw." At least she told her something was true.

Yellowfang appeared to buy her alibi and kept on with her counting. "Six, seven, and eight." she swept the dried leaves away and plopped the fresh ones onto the shelf, next to the burdock roots. Waterlily sighed with relief she wasn't asking any more questions.

"Yellowfang!" called out Fireheart just outside the clearing.

Yellowfang quickly dropped the herbs from her jaws and ran to him. Waterlily raced after her, heart pounding. When she got to the clearing, she could see Fireheart standing over Brackenpaw who had a nasty wound in his leg. She could smell the infection as she padded closer to him. "What happened?" Yellowfang asked, looking up at Fireheart from examining his deep gash.

"A badger. We were on way back from a hunting patrol and we ran into a badger. We luckily fought it off, but Brackenpaw got bit." Fireheart explained.

Yellowfang glanced at the bite more closely. "Quick, Waterlily, get some cobwebs and horsetail ready. Bring him to my den."

Waterlily pelted for the medicine den. The cobwebs were kept near the back just above the moss. It laid nicely in the corner. She twirled her paw through the web a few times before snapping it off with her teeth. On her way to the entrance, Brackenpaw was already inside and lying on his flank.

Yellowfang reached behind and grabbed some horsetail from the

shelf. Waterlily was already through wrapping his leg when Yellowfang turned back around to apply the horsetail. "This will help it not to stick to everything," Waterlily explained.

"He'll stay here for the night." Yellowfang rasped, "We can keep an eye on his leg."

Waterlily was ready to send him on his way. He was a strong apprentice and could handle a bit of pain. Was it really necessary for him to stay the night? Waterlily wondered if she was worried about the time his sister, Cinderpaw, was in here. It was for a very different reason—why would a badger bite worry her?

She shook her head to clear it. It wasn't something she wanted to dwell on. Perhaps Yellowfang saw something she couldn't. Once Fireheart left the den, she turned to Yellowfang, who was padding back to the shelf for some poppy seeds. "This will help with the nerves and help you get some needed rest." Yellowfang rasped, dropping a few tiny, black seeds in front of him.

Brackenpaw carefully lapped them up, wrinkling his nose and squinting his eyes in disgust. Waterlily bounded to the back for a speck of honey and wiped some onto a fresh leaf. She padded over to him with it in her jaws and nudged it toward him. "For the taste." she whispered in her ear, then she turned back to her mentor.

Yellowfang went back to counting the rest of the leaves she had piled up. Waterlily sat beside her in her usual spot and began counting the poppy seeds. "Are you done with the comfrey?" asked Yellowfang with a rather harsh tone.

Waterlily didn't flinch from her words. She was used to her mentor like this. She enjoyed it—It kept her guessing on and her toes. Waterlily formed a smile as she spoke, "Yes, sorry, I'll put it back."

Yellowfang didn't reply, but Waterlily knew she what she was going to say. Yellowfang wasn't always tidy, but when it came to inventory day, she cared where each and every herb was. *If only Yellowfang thought about it every other day.* She thought to herself.

Waterlily picked up the comfrey leaves she had already counted and

placed them onto the shelf next to the where the poppy seeds used to be, then went back to counting, pawing them one by one.

There were five of them left. She had given Brackenpaw three. Why would Yellowfang give out so many when they had this little of supply? Poppy wasn't easy to find. They used to have a nice supply just up in the ravine, but it didn't come back this newleaf. The only other place is in Snakerocks. Waterlily's heart pounded. She didn't want to go herself. There's adders and she was not brave enough to take on such a creature. She could barely fight a squirrel. She put away the poppy seeds and tucked them neatly beside the comfrey leaves and onto a huge bay leaf, making sure each side was prodded up to hold them in place.

"We don't have much left, but we can get that later." meowed Yellowfang, noticing the mere five seeds, "It's near where the adders like to nest sometimes, so you can go with another warrior if you like. Go just before sun down. You might not catch any adders then." she finished, her tail twitching behind her.

Waterlily tensed her shoulders and shuffled her paws. Who could she bring was brave enough to take on a snake? Waterlily widened her eyes. More importantly, why couldn't Yellowfang go—she didn't seem afraid of a snake which could bite you in one swift motion; before you could blink. Waterlily stepped backwards, her tail twitching nervously as she spoke. "Did you have anyone in mind?" she gulped.

Yellowfang shook her head. "You know the Clan best. Choose one you know will take you."

Waterlily rolled her eyes and padded to the back of the den where the small pool water lay. How could Yellowfang not have any pointers on who she should take? Waterlily didn't understand what she meant by 'she knew the Clan best.' She may have been in ThunderClan longer, but she didn't know any of them. Most of them still resented her for being a kittypet. She wasn't afraid to treat their wounds, but if they were to try to tear her apart—she didn't have a chance to even flee.

Fireheart. She thought. *He could fight off an adder if it came*. She

padded over to the warriors den and found him talking to Sandstorm. She hated to intrude, but this was important. "Fireheart, do you mind if I speak with you?" she mewed, stepping inside the brambles, then wriggled her way back out.

Chapter Six

"There's flooding in Sunningrocks!" cried Whitestorm.

Bluestar leaped onto the highrock and looked down at him, her shoulders bristling with fear. "A flood? Is it getting any higher?"

"We don't know for sure." meowed Graystripe, taking a step forward, "But we should do something." He widened his eyes as if trying to make Bluestar obey his words.

Waterlily knew he was only thinking of Silverstream and her Clan. *The she-cat was dead. Why did he care so much about RiverClan now?*

"We can do nothing." replied Bluestar, glancing down at the gray tom. She narrowed her eyes and scanned the rest of the cats who were beginning to emerge from their dens. The cries made them come to the clearing and sit down, watching their leader as she continued to speak, "No one is to leave camp without another warrior with you." she ordered.

Waterlily flinched as Yellowfang nudged her shoulder. "That means you, Waterlily." she meowed playfully.

Waterlily rolled her eyes, though she couldn't imagine wanting to go out alone where there's possible flooding.

Bluestar leaped down from the highrock and padded over to Fireheart and Graystripe—the two warriors who had origially saw the flood happen. Whitestorm was among them and stepped forward, greeting his leader. "What about the Gathering?" he asked.

"We will see when the time comes," she mewed, pressing her head with his.

Waterlily padded back into the medicine den and began pacing the floors. Yellowfang couldn't help but notice and stopped her abruptly

with an angry flick of the tail. "There's no flood here." she hissed.

Waterlily narrowed her amber eyes, "Not yet." she retorted, "What will happen to all our herbs?"

Yellowfang took a deep sigh and rested her plumbing tail over Waterlily's flank. "I don't know." she confessed.

"Well we have to do something. I can't just let all our herbs die. If we don't do anything about it, then we lose everything. We can't afford to start new."

"It's almost Greenleaf. We'll be fine for a while."

Waterlily wasn't convinced. Greenleaf brought in herbs, but the cold would soon hit again. Could they really gather enough before leaf-bare arrived?

Chapter Seven

It was almost half a moon since Waterlily spoke with Fireheart. Bluestar was beginning to get edgy with Fireheart questioning Tigerclaw's treacheries. Yellowfang padded into the medicine den with beech leaves in her jaws. She was carrying the traveling herbs they needed for half-moon tonight. She dropped them down gently, and flicked her tail at Waterlily. "Eat this and let's go. If we want to catch the moonlight, we better get going." She rasped.

Waterlily was glad to be going to the Moonstone. Too many questions haunted her mind, and she needed at least a few answered. Yellowfang scrambled up the ravine, while Waterlily padded up more gracefully. She glanced at Yellowfang with a worried look when they got to the top.

Yellowfang hissed then meowed, "Don't worry about me. I may be old, but I'm not *that* old!"

Waterlily let out a little *mrrow* of laughter then padded on towards the thunderpath just beyond snakerocks. Yellowfang padded after her, keeping silent most of the way there. Crossing the thunderpath got easier. Waterlily hated it, but she was glad the monsters were sleeping around this time.

"Leaf-bare is going to be a harsh one this time around." Rasped Yellowfang.

Waterlily trotted next to Yellowfang. Her pelt almost brushed up against her, "Why do you think that?" She could smell the stench of ShadowClan camp just beyond the moors and wrinkled her nose.

"Can't you feel the air?" Yellowfang's eyes narrowed as they neared the second thunderpath. A ShadowClan patrol was just padding up to them.

Just as Waterlily was going to answer, she saw the ShadowClan deputy walk towards them, his eyes gleamed with suspicion. "Going

to the Moonstone?" He growled lightly.

"Yes." It was Yellowfang who answered. She swiped her tail over Waterlily's mouth, making sure she didn't say anything mouse-brained to the Clan.

The deputy dipped his head then let the two medicine cats through. Waterlily dipped her head in return as she padded on by and they both raced across the small thunderpath. They were now on their way to the Moonstone. Waterlily could just see the high peaks and the cave that led down to the Moonstone just below. Barkface padded up to them, crossing the thunderpath from his territory.

"Yellowfang." He dipped his head, "How is ThunderClan this leaf-bare?" He asked, softly, padding beside them now.

"We have a few cases of whitecough, but nothing too serious." She meowed.

Waterlily didn't pay attention to the conversation. She just looked in the distance, itching to get to the Moonstone and speak with StarClan. Runningnose greeted them with a slight nod. He was sitting just outside the tunnel. His tail was curled around his front paws, though it wasn't long enough to completely cover his paws. Yellowfang and Waterlily stopped in front of him a few tail-lengths away and sat down, waiting for Mudfur. He was the last to arrive. Barkface was sitting beside Runningnose.

Mudfur finally padded up to them. "Sorry I'm late." He mewed, "I had to treat a patient of mine who has greencough." He explained.

"Do you have enough catmint?" Meowed Barkface.

Mudfur nodded, but Waterlily guessed that the brown tom wasn't telling the truth. He was probably too proud to confess that he's struggling. "We should go inside if we want to catch the moonlight in the Moonstone." Meowed Mudfur, changing the subject quickly on the awkwardness.

Yellowfang nodded, "Yes, he's right." She agreed. And all five cats padded down into the dark tunnel. Waterlily padded beside

Yellowfang and could feel her tension as she brushed her pelt a few times unintentionally. She felt Yellowfang let out a low growl, and Waterlily fell back a tail-length behind her. When they got down to the moonstone, the light of the stone walls made Waterlily blink a few times to get adjusted. Waterlily waited till the others were in their spots and settled before she closed her eyes. Yellowfang led the way to the stone walls and laid down almost intsantly.

Waterlily couldn't bring herself to close them just yet. Her mind kept whirling with questions and she didn't know what to ask first. She closed her eyes, but didn't touch her nose to the stones just yet. She let herself sink in the moment, then she finally touched her nose to the cold wall. She wrinkled her nose, then fell into a deep sleep.

Waterlily opened her eyes. She was in StarClan's hunting grounds. She opened her mouth to taste the air, but no scent came to her senses. She twitched her nose in confusion. *Where were the StarClan cats?* She looked around, searching for any movement.

Then she heard a rustling crunch from behind her. She whirled around and saw Spottedleaf padding up to her. Waterlily's eyes brightened and she raced to greet her old friend. She touched her nose to Spottedleaf's flank and wanted to start wailing like a kit does to its mother. Spottedleaf laid her tail across Waterlily's shoulder. "It'll be alright little one." She mewed softly.

Waterlily looked up at her and couldn't fight her happiness and purred. "I'm glad to see you." Then she sat down and wrapped her tail over her front paws. Spottedleaf did the same, waiting to hear what Waterlily might have to say. "I have a lot of questions." She began.

Spottedleaf let out a small purr of amusement then twitched her tail to signal to her to keep going.

"Why was I sent the same dream as Fireheart?" She decided to go with the hardest question first. She kept Spottedleaf's gaze as she stared into the abyss; as if she was thinking on what to say. Did she not want Waterlily knowing the real answer?

"It was something you needed to know." She mewed, looking down at her paws. Then she added, "It'll help you get closer to Fireheart." She explained a little further.

Waterlily was even more confused than she knew was possible. "Why do I need to do that?" She could feel her head burst with many more questions and could barely concentrate on Spottedleaf's words.

Spottedleaf just softly sighed then got up to her paws and rubbed against Waterlily's flank. "You'll soon find out." She mewed, then disappeared. Waterlily felt anger rise in her. She bristled her pelt, then relaxed when she smelled a familiar scent. *Featherwhisker!* She raced over to him, but Featherwhisker didn't seem to notice her. He stood tall, then sat down. He lifted his head up like he was talking to Starpelt above, then began speaking in tongues. "Water quenches fire."

Waterlily blinked in confusion. *Was it a prophecy? And why was StarClan telling her this?* She tipped her head to the side, in hopes that Featherwhisker would continue, but he just faded and Waterlily was forced to wake up.

Water quenches fire. She thought to herself. Her mind was cleared, but now, all she could think about was the prophecy StarClan has told her. *Does Fireheart know of this as well?*

Chapter Eight

The journey back was slow. Waterlily had wanted to get back to camp to speak with Fireheart about her dream. Once they reached camp, she padded into the medicine den and grabbed a few wads of catmint, and gave some to Willowpelt who was just beginning to wake up. Willowpelt blinked her thanks, then lapped up the herbs. Waterlily then padded to the warriors' den and peeked inside. Fireheart was already out of his nest. She looked disappointed, then decided to check a bit around camp before going back to her own nest to sleep.

Fireheart trekked across the clearing and Waterlily almost jumped to his side in one leap. Fireheart gasped and was about to attack her when he realized who she was. "Oh, you scared me." He hissed.

"Sorry." Waterlily mewed, "I just wanted to catch you before you went out on patrol."

Fireheart didn't seem too interested, but he sat down and looked around to see if any other cats were in earshot of them. Waterlily mimicked his sitting position and twitched her tail, impatiently.

"I dreamt that water quenches fire." She felt like she blurted that out, but held her head high in hopes Fireheart didn't notice.

To Fireheart's surprise, it peaked his interest and he pricked his ears. "I had the same dream." He confessed.

Waterlily dipped her head, "I thought you might have." She mewed. "What do you think it means?"

Fireheart shook his head. "I do not know, but whatever it is, it must help us in some way."

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Waterlily got to her paws and stretched out her limbs. She yawned,

then shook out her fluffy pelt. Willowpelt was back to sleep again, and she padded to check on the nursery and elders' den. She padded to the nursery and saw Brindleface's kits playing in the snow. One leaped across a small pile of snow and landed on their sibling. Waterlily purred with amusement then peeked inside the brambles. Cloudkit was just blinking his eyes open and Brindleface stretched out her legs and yawned, almost pushing out Cloudkit.

Waterlily purred in amusement again, then padded to the elders' den. One-eye was talking to Dappletail and her voice was hoarse as she spoke, "It's like all the apprentices nowadays don't respect their elders."

Dappletail nodded in agreement. "What do these mothers teach their kits?" She rasped.

Waterlily padded inside and dipped her head to the old she-cats. "What did the apprentices do this time?" She purred, as she searched Dappletail for any fleas or ticks.

"Oh, just the morning routine and they forget to check our soiled beddings." It was One-eye who answered.

"Of course. I can get those right away." Waterlily mewed. She didn't mind the tasks of the apprentices once in a while. Today, especially it kept her mind busy. She trekked to a large bed of moss just outside the camp entrance. She grabbed some, then padded back to the elders' den. replaced their bedding, then dipped her head, "Is there anything else you'd like?"

Dappletail shook her head slowly. One-eye did the same and blinked her one good eye in thanks.

Waterlily trekked back to the medicine den and found Yellowfang sorting through some coltsfoot and marigolds. Waterlily was about to sit down with her when Mousefur padded in. "I have a scratch that isn't healing." She meowed, showing her paw. "I must have scratched it near the brambles, but I haven't noticed until now." She confessed.

Waterlily dipped her head then padded to the back of the den and

searched through the herb store. She grabbed some dock leaves then chewed them into a poultice. She applied it onto Mousefur.

"Thanks!" Mousefur swiftly nodded, then padded off towards the clearing.

Waterlily then sat beside Yellowfang and began picking apart the coltsfoot and marigold. She put them into neat piles, while Yellowfang's intertwined with the other herbs. As Waterlily effortlessly picked through the herbs, she began thinking of her dream with StarClan. They told Fireheart as well, which is what sparked Waterlily's mind even more. She thought about the words, Water can quench fire. Her mind was whirling with questions.

Yellowfang must have sensed her deep in thought and nudged her. Waterlily shook her head, then looked at Yellowfang with blankness in her eyes. Yellowfang narrowed her eyes, playfully. "Go on, then." She rasped, "Spit it out. What's on your mind?"

Waterlily wasn't ready to tell Yellowfang of the prophecy yet. She looked blankly at her for a few more heartbeats then finally meowed, "I just keep thinking about Spottedleaf, is all." She lied, not knowing what else to say.

Yellowfang narrowed her eyes but didn't press any more questions. Waterlily chewed the last marigold, then pushed the pile to the back of the den near the other piles they had in stock. She padded to the entrance of the den and looked around for Fireheart. He wasn't back yet from hunting. She trekked out into the clearing and found Cinderpaw padding back into camp.

"Cinderpaw!" She called out.

Cinderpaw looked up and trekked over to Waterlily. Her ears pricked with anticipation. She looked as if she was trying to hide the fact that her leg still hurt, but she didn't want to bother the medicine cats. Waterlily blinked, and slightly tilted her head to one side. "Are you alright?" She asked, noticing her awkwardness.

Cinderpaw nodded. "Of course. What's up?" She asked, quickly changing the subject.

"Was Fireheart with you?" She looked off into the distance trying to find him, but he was nowhere to be seen. *Had he gone back to RiverClan? Maybe he went back to Ravenpaw.*

"He was with me, yes. We were doing training together. He says that I'm almost ready for my assessment." She added.

"Where did he go?"

Cinderpaw looked at her confusion. Why was she so obsessed with finding him? She blinked, not really knowing what to say. "He.. he just said that he had to do something and then he'll be back for more battle training."

Waterlily didn't seem to listen to the rest. She looked back up in the distance. "When you see him, tell him I want to speak with him." She then bounded off towards the medicine den. Yellowfang just began counting their supply of catmint. Waterlily heard her muttering the numbers as she pawed each tiny mint leaf.

A few moments later, Fireheart padded into their den, his eyes wide with concern. "You wanted to see me?" He meowed, twitching his tail impatiently.

Waterlily looked up from what she was doing and flicked her tail to follow her out of the den. Yellowfang looked up, and watched them leave together. Her eyes narrowed with suspicion.

"If water quenches fire, then let water do it." She growled, pacing back and forth.

Fireheart was confused and tipped his head to one side. "You called me over to talk about that?"

Waterlily muttered something that he couldn't understand, then she looked at him with bright eyes. "I think that I've got it." She blurted out.

Fireheart was getting impatient with the medicine cat. She seemed to speak in tongues like StarClan. "Well?" He pressed, leaning forward a bit.

"If fire alone can save the clan," She began, sitting down, and wrapping it around her front paws, "and that fire is you. What if water is me?" She finished, looking at Fireheart's reaction.

Fireheart sat in shock. *Why would it mean Waterlily was to help when the prophecy meant he was the one to save them? Unless they have the prophecy all wrong?*

Chapter Nine

Waterlily tensed as she saw Fireheart deep in thought. "That seemed stupid." She mewed. "Sorry." She added, shuffling her paws, awkwardly.

Fireheart looked up at her. "Of course not." He purred. "I'm glad you told me."

Waterlily felt like she was being treated like a kit from how he was speaking to her. She softly rolled her eyes as her head was down so he wouldn't see. "I just don't know what to do, Fireheart." She confessed, looking back up at him.

Fireheart looked at her with soft eyes. "Neither do I. But I am here for you." He purred.

Her amber gaze softened as she looked at him. She then dipped her head, "Cinderpaw said that you wanted to teach her some battling skills, so I'll leave you to it." She mewed, then padded off back towards the medicine den.

"Wait, Waterlily!" He called out to her.

Waterlily stopped and turned her head, looking over her shoulders.

"If you think of anything else. Let me know." He meowed, softly.

Waterlily swiftly nodded, then padded off. Yellowfang was glancing up at her with suspicion. "What was that all about?" She rasped, counting the poppy seeds this time.

Waterlily stiffened. She loved Yellowfang, but she was not yet ready to hear everything. She thought for a moment, and hoped that Yellowfang didn't notice her thinking of something to say.

"Well." She pressed, her eyes growing bigger with impatience. *Was Waterlily always so hard to get answers out of?*

"I just wanted to ask him how Cinderpaw was doing." She mewed.

"You couldn't ask him that here?" She spat.

Waterlily tensed. "I'm sorry Yellowfang." She mewed. That was all she could say. She couldn't bring herself to say anything else. She padded out of the den with her head down, and her plump tail dragged across the snow, making a line following behind her. Yellowfang stared at her in dismay. She was acting weird. She twitched her tail then went back to counting the poppy seeds. She would let Waterlily tell her on her own time.

Waterlily needed some air. Too much pressure was going into her head. She felt like she was keeping too many secrets. She shook her head then trekked up the ravine and up to snakerocks. She padded continuously, not looking where she was headed. She stopped dead, then looked up. She could smell the thunderpath. Had she really strayed that far and not even noticed? She peered across the road and looked over the ShadowClan border. She pricked her ears and opened her mouth to taste the air. "What am I searching for?" She mewed to herself. "Just look away." She added, telling herself. *Just look away*. But she couldn't.

She lifted her head and twitched her nose. Her ears were alerted and she raced behind a tall pile of snow. She peered over the top, her ears laid back flat on her head. Across the thunderpath was a patrol padding alongside it. Monsters roared on by, with their big paws racing on the path now covered with snow. She could hear the soft crunch noises of the snow as she tried to see who was in the patrol.

"Just mark the right borders." Meowed a gray tabby tom.

The small apprentice looked up at him and hissed, "I am!" His pelt bristling with anger.

Waterlily recognized the small brown apprentice from the Gatherings. *It was Oakpaw.* Then Waterlily froze in her tracks when she smelled a familiar scent. She twitched her nose and widened her eyes. *Littlecloud*. She pushed back the urge to race across the thunderpath and to him. *It was forbidden*, She told herself.

Littlecloud padded to the edge of the thunderpath and peered out in the distance. The others in his patrol were heading back into their camp. Littlecloud tilted his head, then sniffed the air. "Waterlily?" He called out.

Waterlily trembled, wishing she could flee right down to him and bury her nose in his fur. She longed to see him just one more time. She then softly sighed. She knew it was something she had to live with. Medicine cats aren't allowed to fall in love and she wasn't about to break the warrior code for something simple like that. She puffed out her chest, and padded back into the forest. She looked up and stared at the trees. They were bare with snow resting on their naked limbs. Some trees even had frozen water droplets, hanging like they were frozen in time.

She looked down, knowing what her duties were. Knowing what she had to do, she padded into the medicine den and looked at Yellowfang in the eyes. Her ears were alerted and her tail trembled. Yellowfang looked up at her. Her eyes were filled with confusion. She blinked a few times, unaware of what to do. *Was it something I said?* Yellowfang thought. She was about to say it out loud when Mousefur and Thornpaw padded into the den.

"Thornpaw, just relax." She whispered, then looked at the medicine cats. "Thornpaw stepped on a thorn."

Waterlily looked up at the she-cat in surprise then nodded her head. She trekked to the herb store and picked up some comfrey and coltsfoot. Yellowfang watched as her apprentice did everything right. She puffed out her chest and a purr rose in her throat. She wanted to praise her like she was just beginning apprenticeship, but she held in her tongue.

"Just rest on that paw until tomorrow. You may sleep in your nest if you like." Waterlily told him. Thornpaw nodded his head then limped to the apprentice den. Mousefur dipped her head in thanks then padded to the warriors' den. Waterlily looked around, almost as if she was looking to see if any more warriors were going to bother them. She glared back at Yellowfang. Yellowfang slunk back and hissed at her.

"We must talk." She then looked away from Yellowfang's gaze. She heard a soft sigh from her, then she looked back at her, a little softer this time.

Yellowfang spoke, "What about?" Her eyes narrowed.

"About the prophecies."

Chapter Ten

Fireheart, Graystripe, Cloudkit and Tigerclaw padded back into camp. Waterlily felt the anger rising in Fireheart as they trekked past the medicine den and up to Bluestar who was speaking to a patrol made of Whitestorm, Longtail and Mousefur. They were reporting what they have found. Waterlily pricked her ears as she continued to chew some comfrey leaves and put them into neat piles beside her.

"I've brought these cats to you," the deputy growled. "One disobedient kit, and two traitors."

"Traitors!" echoed Longtail. "Just what I'd expect of a kittypet." He sneered.

"That's enough," Bluestar ordered, with the faintest hint of a snarl in her voice. Waterlily guessed that she told the patrol to leave, "You may go, all of you." Meowed Bluestar. "Now tell me what happened." She turned to Tigerclaw.

"I saw this kit leaving camp," Tigerclaw began, flicking his tail toward Cloudkit, "after you ordered that no kits or apprentices should go out without a warrior. I went to fetch him back, but when I got into the ravine, I realized he was following a scent trail." He paused, and glared challengingly at Fireheart and Graystripe. "The trail led to the stepping-stones downstream from the Sunningrocks. And what should I see there but these two brave warriors." He spat the words out. "crossing back from RiverClan territory. When I asked them what they were doing, they gave me some fish-and-mouse story about checking to see how far the floods stretched."

Waterlily could feel Fireheart tense, then relaxed when he heard Bluestar's words, "Is this true?" Waterlily could feel her own fur bristling then padded just outside the medicine den to see what was really happening. Had Fireheart and Graystripe really lied? She pricked her ears again, and listened for Fireheart's response.

"Yes," he admitted. "We can explain, but..." He shot a glance at Tigerclaw.

Bluestar closed her eyes for a long moment. When she opened them again, her expression was as unreadable as ever. "Tigerclaw, I'll deal with this. You may go."

The deputy looked as if he was going to object, but under Bluestar's clear gaze he kept silent. He gave her a curt nod and marched off toward the pile of fresh-kill.

"Now, Cloudkit," meowed Bluestar, turning to the white kit. "Do you know why I ordered kits and apprentices not to go out alone?"

"Because the floods are dangerous," replied Cloudkit sullenly. "But I —"

"You disobeyed me and you must be punished. That is the Clan law."

For a moment Fireheart thought that Cloudkit was about to protest, but to his relief the kit just dipped his head and mewed, "Yes, Bluestar."

"Tigerclaw got you to help the elders for a few days recently, didn't he? Very well, you can continue with those duties. It is an honor to serve the other cats in the Clan, and you must learn that it is an honor to obey Clan orders, too. Go now, and see if they have any jobs for you."

Cloudkit bowed his head again and scampered off across the clearing, his tail held high.

Bluestar settled down on the ground with her paws tucked under her. "Tell me what happened," she invited the warriors.

Taking a deep breath, Fireheart mewed, "When we were going to find out how far the water went, we saw two kits drowning and we went in to save them. We noticed they were from RiverClan and went to return them to their mother." His tail twitched, "Except we couldn't go into their camp," he meowed. "It's underwater. They're staying in the bushes on higher ground for now."

"I see..." murmured Bluestar.

"They haven't much shelter," Fireheart went on. "And they're finding it hard to catch prey. They told us that the Twolegs have poisoned the river. Cats get ill if they eat the fish."

"So we felt we had to do something," he finished. "We...we offered to catch prey for RiverClan in our territory, and we've been taking fresh-kill across the river to them. Today Tigerclaw saw us coming back."

"We're not traitors," Graystripe put in. "We only wanted to help."

Bluestar turned to him, then back to Fireheart again. She looked stern, but there was a glimmer of understanding in her eyes. "I understand," she murmured. "I even respect your good intentions. All cats have the right to survive, whatever their Clan. But you know perfectly well that you can't take matters into your own paws like that. You acted deceitfully in slipping away on your own. You lied to Tigerclaw—or at least you didn't tell him all the truth," she added, before Fireheart could protest. "And you hunted for another Clan before your own. This is not how warriors behave."

Waterlily saw Graystripe and Fireheart dip their heads. "We're sorry." Fireheart meowed.

"Feeling sorry isn't always enough," Bluestar meowed, with an edge to her voice. "You will have to be punished. And since you haven't acted like warriors, we'll see if you can remember what it's like to be apprentices. From now on, you can hunt for the elders and see to their needs. And when you hunt, you'll have another warrior to supervise you."

Waterlily tensed. *Was Bluestar really going to punish them like that?* She padded back into the den, hoping they didn't notice her eavesdropping.

Yellowfang then padded into the den with daisies in her mouth. She dropped it in the back of the den near the coltsfoot then went over to Waterlily. She looked deep in thought. "What were you eavesdropping on?" She rasped.

Waterlily looked up at Yellowfang with wide eyes. *How did she know that she was eavesdropping? Did she see her doing so?* She shook her head as if to clear it then meowed, "Fireheart found out that RiverClan is doing pretty badly with the floods."

Yellowfang narrowed her eyes. "Yes, it is weird that floods are coming when it's cold this leaf-bare." She rasped, looking away from Waterlily's gaze.

"Leaf-bare can't be done. Can it?" She asked impatiently.

Yellowfang shook her head. "No. But the snow has begun melting. If this flood gets any worse, there will be no Gathering and we might be forced to leave our camp."

Waterlily widened her eyes. "StarClan help us!" She mewed softly, looking up at silverpelt.

Chapter Eleven

Runningwind padded into the medicine den. His eyes were soft, but he seemed worried. Yellowfang looked up from sorting through some daisy leaves. Her tongue was half out, then she put it back in as she rasped, "What can I do for you Runningwind?"

"Fireheart has gone back to apprentice duties, due to his disloyalty. He won't be feeding RiverClan ever again." He meowed, then padded off out into the clearing to go on patrol. Yellowfang rolled her eyes. *That mouse-brain*. She murmured to herself. She then went back to sorting through the daisies. Waterlily padded up to her then stretched out her legs, yawning.

"What did Runningwind have to say?" She meowed, just after she yawned, and sounding tired.

"Fireheart has gone back to apprentice duties." Yellowfang murmured softly.

"Bluestar really did that?" Her voice was almost in question, though she knew very well he and Graystripe broke the warrior code.

Yellowfang twitched her ear, then dipped her head to the side. "You knew?"

"No, not exactly. I had just guessed." She lied.

Yellowfang narrowed her eyes, but she didn't press for anymore answers.

Waterlily was about to go out of the den, but she ran into Fireheart. He had one mouse in his jaws and a squirrel hanging from its tail. He dropped the mouse in front of Waterlily, then padded to Yellowfang and gave her the squirrel. "This is for you." He meowed. Waterlily took the mouse and ate it just beside the medicine den.

"Oh, yes, Runningwind told me you were back on apprentice

duties," Yellowfang growled. "Mouse-brain! You might have known some cat would find out you were helping RiverClan."

"Well, it's done now." Fireheart didn't want to talk about his punishment.

To his relief, Yellowfang seemed happy to change the subject. "I'm glad you've come," she meowed, "because I want a word with you. You see that poultice?" She lifted her muzzle toward the green mash of chewed leaves.

"Yes."

"It's for Smallear. He's in my den now, with the worst case of stiff joints I've seen in moons. He can hardly move. And if you ask me, it's all because his nest was recently lined with damp moss." Her tone was mild, but her yellow eyes burned into Fireheart's.

Fireheart felt his heart sink. "This is about Cloudkit, isn't it?"

"I think so," mewed Yellowfang. "He's been careless about the bedding he's brought in. If you ask me, he hasn't bothered to shake the water off."

"But I showed him how—" Fireheart broke off. *He had troubles enough of his own*. "I'll have a word with him," he promised.

"Do that," grunted Yellowfang. She looked back down, going back to what she was doing.

"I'll go and find Cloudkit, right now." He sighed, touching his nose to Yellowfang's flank before padding out of her den.

Waterlily padded back into the den. She wanted to speak more about Fireheart, but decided it was probably best that she didn't. Yellowfang lifted her head, saw who it was, then went back to eating her squirrel.

"Would you like me to check on the elders? Since Smallear is stiff, maybe the others are too?" Waterlily mewed.

Yellowfang lifted her muzzle, "Sure. When you come back. We'll go

hunting for more herbs. I believe we're running out of honey and Heather nectar."

Waterlily dipped her head then bounded off towards the elders den with some goldenrod in her mouth.

One-eye rasped her tongue over her paw, then swiped it across her face. Dappletail was sleeping just beside One-eye and Halftail was just beginning to stir. Brokentail was sleeping soundly. His sides were heaving heavily which meant he was in deep sleep.

"Anyone else having joint pains?" She asked, sitting down just inside the den.

"I have a bit of ache on my shoulder." Rasped Halftail.

Waterlily chewed some of the goldenrod into a poultice and then applied to the places Halftail pointed out.

"Thank you." He meowed, a purr rumbling in his throat.

Waterlily dipped her head then was going to pad out of the elders' den until she heard Halftail speak to Dappletail and One-eye.

"If you ask me, Yellowfang has been acting weird. She's been speaking with Brokentail." Halftail rasped, in a hush voice so Brokentail couldn't listen just in case he woke up. "I fear that we may in trouble with her."

Waterlily could feel her paws trembling with anger. She whirled around, and narrowed her eyes as she spoke, cutting off whoever was going to reply. "Yellowfang is not the one you should worry about." She hissed. "She is not doing anything wrong. So leave her alone."

Halftail looked up at her in shock, his eyes wide with embarrassment that Waterlily had overhead him. "I-I'm sorry." He stammered. "I just assumed..."

"You assumed wrong." She spat, before heading out of the den. The elders widened their eyes from her sharp mew. They exchanged worry glances at one another, but didn't say anything more.

Waterlily trekked to the medicine den. Her eyes were still narrowed. Yellowfang shot up her head, her eyes wide with worry as she heard Waterlily almost stomping into the den. "What's wrong?"

"I must go back to the Moonstone." She murmured.

Yellowfang got to her paws and gently laid her tail on Waterlily's flank. "Are you sure?" She asked, "We were just there not too long ago." She added, letting her tail slide off Waterlily's bristled fur.

"Yes, I'm sure. There are too many questions that remain unanswered." Her mew was sharp. She shook her head to clear it. "It's just something that I must do."

Yellowfang nodded her head. "Take a warrior with you."

"No," Waterlily shook her head, "if I take a warrior, it might seem like a threat. I must go alone."

Yellowfang wanted to argue, but knew that she may be right. "Alright." She rasped, going back to sorting through last bit of herbs she had in front of her.

Waterlily padded to her side, grabbed a few of the awful tearing of herbs that Yellowfang had done and began picking at them to make them neater. "I'll leave just after sunhigh. I'll get to the Moonstone by nightfall. The moon should be risen enough by then."

Chapter Twelve

The sun beamed high above the camp. Waterlily made a pile of traveling herbs for herself, added some honey to the mix and then ate it. She dipped her head to Yellowfang, then she trekked out into the clearing, and up the ravine that lead into the snowy gorse tunnel out of camp. She was glad to be alone and traveling to the Moonstone.

She padded towards the thunderpath and opened her mouth to taste the air. She didn't feel like explaining herself to a border patrol. Luckily there was only the scent of faint ThunderClan cats. She trekked through the snow, and pushed her way through a bush covered in white. Snow pellets clumped to her fur as she stopped at the edge of the thunderpath. She looked both ways, then raced across, not looking back. She could feel her paws aching from the cold grounds.

"How in the name of StarClan can those monsters bare the cold on their paws?" She hissed out loud to herself. She shook off her pelt, but the pellets clung to her fur like ticks. She pushed through the clearing of the ShadowClan border and walked along it, hoping no patrol on this end would spot her either. Though, for ShadowClan, she didn't have to say *why* she was going to the Moonstone.

She was just about to cross the small thunderpath when a ShadowClan patrol padded up to her. She tightened her chest, and tensed. Littlecloud was not among them. She let out a small sigh of relief and greeted them politely.

"Greetings Wetfoot." She dipped her head to the warrior.

Wetfoot dipped his head in return, "It can't be half-moon already." He meowed.

Waterlily shook her head, "No, but I am traveling to the Moonstone. I need to speak with StarClan and it couldn't wait until next half-moon."

"Why, what's so important?" It was another warrior that replied.

Waterlily glanced at the tom. She recognized him, but couldn't remember why it was of importance. Then she remembered, it was Clawface. He was the one that had killed Spottedleaf! She fought with all of StarClan to keep herself calm. "It's medicine cat business." She mewed, narrowing her eyes.

Wetfoot could sense his anger and flicked his tail to the rest of the cats, "We won't stop you." He meowed, curtly.

Waterlily dipped her head in thanks, then trekked on along the border and across the small thunderpath. Monsters rarely padded along that path, so she had no worries of being as careful here. She could feel the air getting colder as she neared the pathway that led down the tunnel into Mothermouth. She shivered, but pushed on. It would be warmer in the caves. There was no wind to make her chilly as she slept.

She could hear the wind howling and blowing past her ears, but she had no idea if it was trying to whisper words to her. She couldn't understand. It all just sounded like a very windy day.

She trekked along down the path into Mothermouth and into the cave where the moonlight shined through the walls. Her eyes twinkled in the starlight as she looked up. She then laid down, touched her nose to the stone walls, and closed her eyes. She let the stars take over her mind before she opened her eyes again.

She opened her eyes and looked around. She was at least in StarClan's hunting grounds. She opened her jaws to taste the air, but no scents came to her.

"Spottedleaf!" She called out. There was no answer.
"Featherwhisker?" She called out a different cat. Still no answer. She padded a few steps further into StarClan territory. She lowered her head, and was about to walk back to where she laid when she heard a voice call out to her.

"Waterlily. You have questions, don't you?" Her mew was soft and calming.

"Spottedleaf." Waterlily purred. "I have questions about Tigerclaw and Brokentail." She added.

Spottedleaf clouded her eyes with worry. "Many things will remain unanswered. StarClan doesn't even know what Tigerclaw may be up to." She confessed, not taking her gaze off Waterlily's.

"I thought as much." She lowered her head in shame, almost embarrassed that she traveled all this way just to hear something that she had already expected.

"But I can tell you that your pathway is about to change. Don't fear what you find hiding in the shadows."

"What do you mean by that?" Waterlily looked puzzled.

Spottedleaf just touched her nose to Waterlily's cheek, then padded away into the distance. Waterlily gathered all her strength to stay where she stood and not run after Spottedleaf like a lost kit. *Don't fear what I find in the shadows.* She echoed in her mind.

Waterlily opened her eyes. She was back in Mothermouth and she got to her paws, looking around. She was used to other cats waking up with her, but she was alone. *Yellowfang might want to know why I came here. If StarClan gave me no answers, how am I to tell her why I even went here at all?* Her mind clouded with anger, then she pushed it back as she padded out of the dark tunnel and into the darkness of night. She was there for only half the night.

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She padded tiredly back into the ThunderClan borders. Snow began to drift as the wind blew harder. Her eyes stung from the cold and wind. She fluffed out her fur, and heard a soft crunching noise behind her, followed a pitiful mew. She whirled around and saw a tiny black kit staring up at her. She tilted her head to the side in confusion, then bent down to sniff the kit. It was a tom and didn't smell of any Clan.

"Can you speak?" She asked, her head still lowered to the kit's level.

The kit blinked up at her and tilted his head. Waterlily guessed that

he couldn't speak. He just mewed and looked up at her in awe. *Am I supposed to bring this kit back to ThunderClan?* She lifted her head and looked up at silverpelt. Then she remembered what Spottedleaf had told her. *Don't fear what you find in the shadows*.

Chapter Thirteen

Waterlily padded into ThunderClan camp with the tiny black kit in her jaws. Luckily it was still dark as she padded into the nursery. Frostfur stirred and blinked open her eyes. She then widened them. "What are you doing bringing in a kit?" She mewed in a hushed voice. She glanced around, hoping she didn't wake the others.

Waterlily dropped the kit at Frostfur's paws. "I found him just inside the ThunderClan borders." She explained. "He doesn't smell of any Clan scent. Nor does he smell of a kittypet. I think he might have been a loner's kit."

"What if the she-cat comes back looking for it?" Frostfur hissed.

"She won't."

"And how do you know this?" Frostfur's voice was almost shaken as the kit looked up at her with wide eyes and amusement.

"He was alone. When I found him, he began following me. I think he was meant to be here." She dared not say anything more, but she was certain that he could be apart of what Spottedleaf was talking about. He was the color of a shadow.

Frostfur didn't take her eyes off the kit. She softly sighed then nodded her head. "Alright. But if the mother comes looking for him, he's leaving."

Waterlily nodded. "Of course. Just until his mother comes to find him." She agreed. Then she ducked out of the nursery and trekked back to the medicine den. She curled up in her nest and closed her eyes to sleep.

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"ThunderClan is no longer a Clan!" Hissed a tom.

"We might as well be loners!" Hissed another tom.

Waterlily opened her eyes and padded out of the den. She could see most of the Clan in the clearing. She padded slowly out into the clearing, her eyes shifting from one cat to another. Most of the cats seemed to be okay with it, while others bristled their fur. Bluestar sat up on the highrock looking at Frostfur with the kit between her paws. Waterlily raced to the queen's side and looked down at the kit. He looked up at her and purred happily, then stomped awkwardly towards her.

"We should have known!" Hissed a tabby tom.

Waterlily whirled around and glared at him. It was Longtail who had spoke. "I should have known that you wouldn't like him." She taunted back.

Longtail didn't say anything more, but Waterlily knew he was still not satisfied with her words.

Waterlily jumped over the kit that was trying to bat at her tuft of fur on her chest, then trekked to the highrock. She whispered to Bluestar then waited for her to nod her head. Bluestar dipped her head, then stepped aside so Waterlily could stand beside her. "I brought this kit here because he was most likely abandoned from some loner. I have asked Frostfur to take care of him until his mother comes looking for him." *Though I have doubts that she ever will.* She added to herself. "His name for now will be Shadowkit."

Soft murmurs rose from the Clan. Waterlily couldn't tell if they were murmurs of agreement or murmurs of disapproval. She glanced at Bluestar and all she did was nod her head approvingly.

Waterlily puffed out her chest, then leaped back down from the highrock. She felt judgement as she padded back through the crowd of cats and she stopped in front of Frostfur. "Thank you." She mewed, softening her eyes. Then she looked down at Shadowkit. "Welcome to ThunderClan, Shadowkit." She added, purring.

Bluestar leaped down from the highrock and flicked her tail implying that the meeting was over. The cats murmured in hushed voices as they went back to their morning duties. Waterlily followed Frostfur and Shadowkit to the nursery.

Cloudkit bounded up to Shadowkit. "Can he play yet?" He mewed, excitedly.

Frostfur shook her head, "He can't play any rough games yet." She meowed, "He will pretty soon, don't you worry."

Waterlily felt sorrow wash over Cloudkit, but it quickly went away when he realized it might not actually be that long. Waterlily turned to Shadowkit. His round green eyes looked up at her and he managed to purr again as she spoke. "I will come visit you soon to see how you're doing."

She padded back to the medicine den and gave another dose of marigold to Smallear. Yellowfang padded into the den behind her.

"Another kit coming into the Clans?" She rasped.

"He was a loner, I'm sure of it. I didn't steal him."

Yellowfang lifted her head a little bit, then let out a little mrrow of laughter. "I did not accuse you of doing so."

Waterlily dipped in her head in embarrassment. "Sorry, it's just that I heard so many cats already say..."

She was cut off by Yellowfang, "I know. I'm sure he'll become a great warrior one day." Yellowfang's eyes softened.

"But what if he's from twolegs? Like Fireheart, Cloudkit and me? The Clans will think that we're too soft." She confessed, laying down, then resting her head on her paws.

Yellowfang padded up to her and laid the tip of her tail on Waterlily's shoulder. "The Clans already do think ThunderClan is too soft. I used to be ShadowClan, don't forget." She rasped, amusingly.

"That doesn't help." Waterlily hissed, lifting her head and closing her eyes as if to hide in her anger.

"I...you're right." Yellowfang stuttered, then padded back to sorting daisies and feverfew. Waterlily stayed where she was and rested her

head on her paws again. She gazed across the clearing, watching as the Cinderpaw and Brackenpaw head out of camp to do some battle training outside the hollow. Fireheart and Graystripe were leading them. Then she pricked her ears as she heard tint kits playing in the bits of snow still left on the ground.

"Can't catch me!" Mewed one of Brindleface's kits.

"Oh yes I can! Just watch me!" Mewed another, scampering after their sibling.

Waterlily softly sighed at the thought of having kits. She couldn't grasp the amount of patience needed for them. She was glad that she was a medicine cat. A medicine cat is forbidden to have them. Then she began wondering what it would have been like if she actually did become a warrior. *Would I have settled in with a mate?* She shook her head to clear it. *No, whatever the past was, I am a medicine cat and I am proud of that.*

Chapter Fourteen

Waterlily padded to the nursery with some moss hanging from her jaws. Dropping it, she dipped her head to the queens as they lifted their muzzles. "Greetings, I just want to check on..." She broke off as her gaze drifted to the young black tom.

Shadowkit pricked his ears as Waterlily spoke. He got up on his tiny paws and padded over to her. He rubbed his whole body against her legs, but wasn't able to reach quite yet to her flank.

Waterlily looked down at him with awe. Then she looked back up at Frostfur. "Thank you again for taking him in."

Frostfur scoffed, "Luckily he doesn't need any milk. Or you'd be out of luck." She retorted. "Brindleface has milk, but she couldn't have taken in another kit."

"I know." Waterlily mewed, dipping her head respectively to the queen. "I am, however, still grateful to you." Then she ducked under the brambles hovering over the nursery entrance.

As she padded out of the den, she heard Frostfur call out, "Shadowkit! Come back inside!" But the kit was already racing behind Waterlily.

Waterlily stopped and turned around. "Shadowkit, what are you doing outside of the den? You aren't old enough just yet to be out and about alone."

"I want to be with you!" He wailed.

Waterlily turned her gaze to Frostfur. She was standing just outside the nursery, watching him with an intent and worried stare.

"You can talk?" Waterlily purred, looking back down at the kit. She didn't know whether to be happy about it or angry that he didn't speak before.

"I could." He mewed, softly, "It's just that I didn't trust anyone."

"Well, go back to Frostfur. She will be the one to take care of you. You can trust her." She looked over at Frostfur and saw her worried gaze turn into softness. She did care for him after all. "She will be your mother." Waterlily added, not taking her eyes off of Frostfur.

Frostfur dipped her head in thanks, then called out to Shadowkit again. "Shadowkit, come inside. You'll get greencough if you stay too long out there."

Shadowkit reluctantly padded back to his new mother. He touched noses with Frostfur then followed her back into the nursery. Waterlily watched as the kit's tail disappeared into the brambles. She softly sighed then padded into the elders' den to check for fleas.

Dappletail was just yawning as Waterlily padded inside. One-eye's one good eye opened and she yawned just after Dappletail. Halftail was beginning to lick his chest, then looked up at Waterlily, his tongue was sticking half out. Patchpelt laid just beside the old she-cat, Dappletail, and was snoring away. "I'm here to check for fleas." Waterlily mewed, trying not to wake Patchpelt.

Dappletail grunted then flicked her tail, "I have quite a few on my back, I think." She rasped. Waterlily zig-zagged her way further into the den and almost had to leap over Patchpelt just to get to her. She couldn't see any fleas crawling on her fur, so she pushed her nose into Dappletail's flank. She searched for them almost blindly, then found one. She bit down and a tiny crunch was heard. She found another one and bit down again.

"This has to be the craziest leaf-bare ever." Rasped Dappletail.

Waterlily didn't respond. She bit down on another flea just on her side.

"Yes, it has been." One-eye rasped. "Raining when it should be snowing." She added.

"But not having the snow is good, isn't it?" Waterlily meowed, after just biting down on the last flea. A small crunch was heard in the

silence of the den.

Then Dappletail's voice was heard, "Not necessarily. Snow is also a bad thing. It brings us sickness."

"Anyone else have fleas?" Mewed Waterlily.

The elders shook their heads. Waterlily then got to her paws, then dipped her head to the them. "I will be back to check for any more fleas tomorrow after sun high." She meowed, then padded outside of the den, hunching her back under the bracken that lay across the top of the entrance. She trekked through the camp then veered back into the medicine den.

Yellowfang was just chewing up some feverfew, then giving some to Runningwind. Waterlily Padded into the den slowly. "He has a fever?" She mewed, trying not to awaken the old tom.

Yellowfang nodded and her eyes clouded with worry. "We need more catmint. We have run out. He has only a fever, but most fevers could turn into greencough."

"We know where to get some." Meowed Waterlily, her gaze was intense on Yellowfang.

Yellowfang shook her head. "No, we already went there once this leaf-bare. We mustn't seem weak."

"They won't see us as weak. RiverClan can help."

"RiverClan could barely supply for us last time. What makes you think they would have some left now?" Yellowfang's gaze blazed like fire.

Waterlily looked down, no longer able to look Yellowfang in the eyes. "It's leaf-bare, Yellowfang." She mewed, still looking down at her paws, "We're in need of catmint." *As always.* She added under her breath.

Yellowfang's eyes still burned, but her voice had softened, "I will not risk it. We are too close to battling right now."

Waterlily sighed. *Yeah, but medicine cats can travel without quarrels.* She bit back her tongue. There was no point in arguing with the old medicine she-cat.

"Did you check the kits?" Yellowfang rasped, softening her eyes and changing the subject.

Waterlily nodded silently.

"Good. Come on." Yellowfang beckoned her tail for Waterlily to follow her out of the den. Waterlily looked up in dismay, but followed her anyways. She followed Yellowfang just outside the camp near the sandy hollow. "We're going to practice battle skills."

Waterlily widened her eyes, and she felt stiff. *Did she really have to fight this old she-cat?* She tilted her head to the side.

"Even medicine cats need to learn battle skills."

Waterlily was quite confused. She already knew how to battle. Perhaps Yellowfang had forgotten she was a warrior apprentice before she was here. But she crouched down, ready to pounce and narrowed her eyes. "Ready when you are." She mewed. She was now determined to prove to Yellowfang that she was battle ready.

Yellowfang sat back on her haunches, then ran toward Waterlily. Waterlily stayed where she was, ready to leap when Yellowfang got close enough. Waterlily leaped into the air and was prepared to land on Yellowfang's back, but Yellowfang veered away too quickly. She rolled over and made Waterlily land awkwardly on her paws, and she tumbled over. *Oof!* Waterlily got to her paws and shook off her pelt, then darted for Yellowfang again, but Yellowfang was already leaping into the air and knocked Waterlily off her paws. Waterlily went tumbling over a few tail-lengths away, then found herself on her back with Yellowfang standing over her. *For an old cat, Yellowfang really knew how to fight!*

Chapter Fifteen

Waterlily felt every bone in her body quiver with pain. She didn't think medicine cats could feel this way, but she did. Yellowfang was a very good fighter, and made Waterlily think that she may never be able to be in a real battle. Runningwind really took it easy on her when she trained with him. She heaved onto her paws from her nest and took a few steps towards the herb supplies and picked up a daisy leaf. She chewed it into a paste, then swallowed. It was quite bitter. She scrunched up her muzzle and shook her head a little bit before being able to get the awful taste out of her mind.

Yellowfang padded into the den, her head held high. "Still sore from the battle training?" She purred, amusingly.

Waterlily didn't respond. She just flicked her tail from annoyance, then went back to her nest to rest some more. Yellowfang gently traced Waterlily's back with her tail, like a mother would do for her kit. "Once you've gotten your rest, make sure to get something to eat." Ordered Yellowfang.

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Waterlily stretched out her front paws, then her back paws. She opened her jaws wide in a yawn, then shook out her pelt as the midday sun crept through the den entrance. She padded out of the den and towards the fresh-kill pile. It was low, but better than nothing. She chose a large vole for herself. She was about to choose a mouse for Yellowfang when she padded up behind her.

"I already had something." She rasped, as she approached Waterlily. "Once you're done with that, I think checking the catmint supply we have growing. I know it's leaf-bare, but maybe we have at least some more leaves we can carry back."

"Let's hope." Waterlily mewed, settling down a few tail-lengths away from the fresh-kill pile. She put the vole between her paws, then took a big bite of it and swallowing it almost instantly.

Yellowfang swiped a paw over her face, then she licked her paw and swiped it over her face once more.

"Yellowfang!" Yowled a voice.

Yellowfang shot up to her paws and looked around frantically. She couldn't see anyone around her, calling for her. Then Fireheart ran toward her. "Yellowfang," He mewed, "It's Cinderpaw." His eyes were wide with fear.

Waterlily swallowed the last morsel of her vole, then raced after Yellowfang and Fireheart. She could feel the fear in Fireheart like a mouse trapped in a corner with cats all around. *Cinderpaw can't be hurt again! She just can't!*

Fireheart led them to the sandy hollow and stopped just beside a big bush with dark red berries scattered around. Cinderpaw laid on the ground, her mouth foaming and she struggled to breathe. Yellowfang stood aside and let Waterlily make her through. Waterlily looked up at Yellowfang with fear in her eyes. "What do I do?" She meowed, her voice almost cracking.

"We need a special kind of moss." Yellowfang almost couldn't say the words out loud. It was in a whisper that only Waterlily could hear. "A moss that does not grow in this part of the forest."

Waterlily widened her eyes. She took her gaze to Fireheart and her eyes pleaded. "Take her to the medicine den as fast as you can. I believe we have the right moss there." Then she looked at Yellowfang. "Do you know where to find some?" She added, urgently.

Yellowfang nodded her head, "We don't have time to look for some. We do have just a bit of it in the back of the store. Should be just enough for Cinderpaw."

Waterlily and Yellowfang raced after Fireheart as he carried Cinderpaw in his jaws. Her body almost going limp from the struggle to breathe. "Just keep holding on, Cinderpaw!" Waterlily called out. She quickly raced past Fireheart, grabbed the moss, then tried to shove some of it down Cinderpaw's throat. For a long

moment, Cinderpaw laid motionless. Waterlily stood over her limp body. She glanced up at Yellowfang, her eyes filled with sorrow. Yellowfang exchanged the same glance and the both stood in silence.

"Is she..." Fireheart couldn't bring himself to finish his thought.

Just as Waterlily was going to reply, she heard a retching sound coming from Cinderpaw. She gasped then looked down at her and watched her in dismay. Cinderpaw retched again, then she panted, heavily. "She's going to be alright." Waterlily looked back up at Fireheart and purred.

Waterlily saw Fireheart sigh with relief. Then he sat down in silence, not taking his eyes off her. "Get some rest, Fireheart." Yellowfang meowed.

"Cinderpaw will be fine within the next sunhigh. I promise you." Waterlily added behind Yellowfang.

Fireheart dipped his head, "Thank you. I owe it to the both of you." He looked both medicine she-cats in the eyes for a few moments before padding out of the den and towards the warriors' den.

Waterlily turned to Yellowfang, fear blazing in her eyes. "Will she really be okay?" She whispered in Yellowfang's ears.

Yellowfang slowly turned to face her and flicked her tail impatiently. "Of course. Why wouldn't she be?" She saw the fear in Waterlily's eyes then widened her own. *Did Waterlily know something?*

"She has had lots of trauma, Yellowfang. Will she be a warrior in time with her brother?"

Yellowfang kept her gaze for a long moment before answering. "She must know how far behind she's in her training. It is not her fault, but it is something Bluestar cannot change. When Fireheart believes that she is ready, she will become a full warrior."

Waterlily looked away from Yellowfang's gaze, and looked down at her paws in sadness. *If Cinderpaw was to get in anymore trauma, she*

would have to be confined to camp for many moons or move to the elders' den. Waterlily shook her head as if to clear it. *No, she will get better and she will become a full warrior.*

Yellowfang put her tail over Waterlily's shoulder. "I know you're worried for her. But you needn't have to be. Cinderpaw is strong because of you."

Chapter Sixteen

Waterlily looked back up at Yellowfang and her eyes brightened. She saw flicker of love in Yellowfang's eyes. "Thanks." Waterlily purred. Yellowfang dipped her head, then brushed her tail over Cinderpaw's body as if to calm her.

"Sleep, young one." She murmured softly to the young gray apprentice.

Cinderpaw didn't fight the drowsiness she felt and she slowly closed her eyes and fell in a deep rhythm of breaths. Waterlily stayed by her side all sunrise and almost into the night. Yellowfang was already finished with counting and sorting when Waterlily finally got to her paws. Yellowfang pricked her ears when she heard paw steps not too far from the medicine den. Then voices and murmurs were heard just outside the den. Waterlily exchanged a glance with Yellowfang, and they both sat in silence listening.

"Go with Tigerclaw and see if you can a clear path to Fourtrees. The Gathering is in two moonrises from now and we must be able to get there." It was Bluestar that spoke first.

"Yes, Fireheart may come." Waterlily guessed it was Tigerclaw from his harsh tone. "But if he puts a paw wrong, I'll want to know the reason why." Paw steps were heard and the cats padded away. They were now too far from ear shot.

Yellowfang narrowed her eyes. "If we can't get to Fourtrees the normal way, we'll have to go through ShadowClan and that will be a big mistake."

Waterlily tilted her head to the side, "Why?"

"They will never let us pass through, even if there is a truce. I just hope they are able to find another way."

Waterlily bristled her fur. She did not want to trek through

ShadowClan territory just for a Gathering. "I hope so too." She mewed softly, her amber gaze glinting from the sun's rays.

Smallear, still too weak and hurting, laid a few fox-lengths from Cinderpaw. His sides heaved slowly up and down. Yellowfang padded over to him with some comfrey leaves and some poultice dripping from the leaves in her jaws. "Eat as much as you can." She whispered to Smallear. Then she lifted her head and turned to Waterlily, "Make sure the elders have had their fill and don't have fleas or ticks. Check the nursery as well. Once you're finished with that, get some fresh-kill for yourself."

Waterlily nodded without a word, grabbed some comfrey just in case the other elders were feeling stiff as well and she bounded over to the elders' den. "Back so soon?" Rasped Dappletail. She was sitting up and licked her chest fur. Her once pretty mottled, tortoiseshell coat was matted and small clumps as she rasped her tongue over it.

"Just coming to make sure you were fed and have no stiff joints. Smallear has been complaining a lot lately about his aching joints." Waterlily explained with the comfrey still in her jaws.

"Smallear would complain to all of StarClan." Replied Halftail.

Dappletail rolled her clouded, amber eyes. "Yes, true." She rasped in between licks. Then she stopped and looked up at Waterlily. "We had our fill, thanks."

"Good. If you need anything..."

"We know." Hissed One-eye. She opened her one good eye and let out a low growl. "I'm trying to sleep." She added.

Dappletail brushed her tail over the old she-cat's flank. "You have been sleeping all day. Let Waterlily be." She hissed.

Waterlily couldn't help but let a small mrrow of laughter as Dappletail hushed the two old warriors. It was like she was the only one who had respected her. Waterlily dipped her head in thanks, then ducked out of the elders' den. She passed by the nursery, then

stopped in her tracks. She looked back at the entrance of the nursery and could hear tiny meows and purrs. *How was Shadowkit doing?* She dropped the comfrey leaves then crawled underneath the snowy brambles covering the entrance.

"Shadowkit?" She mewed softly.

Frostfur lifted her head and alerted her ears in alarm, then relaxed when she saw Waterlily. "He's here." She mewed, lifting her tail. A small black tom laid, curled up next to Frostfur's belly. He opened his round, green eyes and stared at Waterlily for a few heartbeats before lifting his head and purred. "Have you had vole yet?" Waterlily mewed, crouching down to Shadowkit's level.

Shadowkit widened his eyes. "No."

Waterlily looked up at Frostfur. She was about to open her jaws and ask for permission to take him out of the nursery, but Frostfur must have guessed that already. She dipped her head, gently nudged Shadowkit onwards.

"Come on," Waterlily purred, flicking her tail. "Follow me."

Shadowkit stretched out his tiny paws and yawned, then bounded after Waterlily. He was much more sturdy on his paws now. He brushed up against Waterlily as he followed her to the fresh-kill pile. He stopped next to her and sniffed the pile. He opened her jaws to choose a large mouse, but Waterlily stopped him.

"No." She mewed, softly. "That's a mouse." Waterlily moved another mouse from the pile and lifted up a small, brown vole. "This is a vole. These are my favorite." She added, setting it down in front of Shadowkit. Shadowkit widened his eyes. They were almost as big as the moon. He bit down on the vole's neck and began dragging it, very slowly, to the nursery. Waterlily helped him along whenever the vole got caught on a large clump of melting snow. "Almost there." Waterlily urged him on.

"Look what I got!" Shadowkit purred, dragging the vole into the nursery and stopped in front of Frostfur.

"You dragged that all the way here?" Frostfur asked.

Shadowkit dropped the vole, then nodded his head vigorously, clearly proud at what he had done. Frostfur softly purred in response and let Shadowkit have his first bite of vole. He took as big of a bite as he could and chewed it for what seemed like a long time. "Well?" Frostfur, mewed, as if she was reading Waterlily's thoughts.

"It's great!" He exclaimed. He took another mouthful. Frostfur watched him eat for another a few moments then he yawned. His belly was full and happy.

Waterlily padded back into the medicine den with two small mice. One for Yellowfang and one for herself. As the two she-cats laid side by side, Waterlily looked out into the distance. *This would be the first Gathering of real importance*. She thought to herself. Fireheart and Tigerclaw must find a way to get there. It cannot be missed.

Chapter Seventeen

"As you know, the moon is full tonight." Bluestar began. She stood on the highrock speaking to the whole clan. "Darkstripe has led a patrol to find out how the stream was leading to Fourtrees." She turned to Darkstripe. "Please tell us what you saw."

Darkstripe took a step forward, then puffed out his chest just before he spoke, "The water is going down, but not fast enough." He meowed. "We went as far as the thunderpath. We won't be able to make it without swimming." He added.

"The stream is narrower up there," Meowed Willowpelt, standing up. "Couldn't we just jump across?"

Darkstripe narrowed his eyes, "Yeah, if you grow wings." He growled.

Bluestar lashed her tail for silence as loud murmurs began to stir within the Clan. "We will start there." She decided. Then she rose to her paws and led the warriors out of camp.

Waterlily padded after them and found herself keeping pace with Fireheart. Graystripe was a few tail-lengths ahead. As they padded up the ravine and through the gorse tunnel, Waterlily could feel Fireheart's body tense. "Are you okay?" She whispered.

Fireheart nodded his head, then whispered very faintly, "I'll tell you after the Gathering."

Waterlily felt her hair on her pelt bristle with anticipation. *What was it that Fireheart had to say?* She still kept pace with him and they headed up towards the thunderpath. Waterlily tense. They were at the thunderpath. The normal route was flooded, but so was the thunderpath. Monsters passed by slowly, throwing up filthy water from their huge black paws. Waterlily took a step backwards. Did they have to cross the thunderpath?

Bluestar flicked her tail and led the cats to the edge of the path. She sniffed the black ground and wrinkled her nose from the horrible stench. Then she dipped one paw onto it. "It's shallow enough here." She meowed. "We can walk across this until we're on the other side of the stream and get to Fourtrees along the ShadowClan border."

Waterlily tensed. *Walk across the thunderpath?* Fireheart exchanged a worried glance with her. The others must have felt the same way and followed Bluestar reluctantly onto the flooded thunderpath. When the water lapped up onto Waterlily's paws, she wanted to shriek from the bitter cold, but she held it in. Fireheart kept pace just a half tail-length in front of her.

"What if another monster comes?" Meowed Graystripe. He was up a fox-length away and his eyes were filled worry.

"We will stay on the side. Even the monsters are going slow. They must hate the water on their paws." Bluestar replied, not stopping as she trudged through the water.

At first everything was quiet, except for a single monster traveling in the other direction on the opposite side of the thunderpath. Then the familiar growling and the splash of an approaching monster reared up from behind them.

"Watch out!" Tigerclaw called from the back of the warriors.

Fireheart froze, pressing himself against the low wall that edged the thunderpath as it crossed the stream. Darkstripe scrambled on top of it and crouched there, baring his teeth at the monster as it passed. Waterlily crouched just beside Fireheart. Her ears laid flat on her head as the monster roared up closer.

For a moment its strange glittering colors were reflected in the stinking water, and a wave washed out from it, soaking Fireheart as far as his belly fur. Waterlily let out a screech as the muddy water hit her as well. She shook off her pelt, then looked at Bluestar. She flicked her tail for everyone to keep moving. They were heading straight into ShadowClan territory. The low-lying land on the ThunderClan side was covered with water. There was nothing to do but continue along the edge of the thunderpath until the land rose

and was dry enough to walk on.

Bluestar quickened the pace until they were racing across the sodden turf. There were few trees here, and the close-cropped grass offered no cover for trespassing cats. ShadowClan cats caught them, they would be in trouble, but Fourtrees was not far away, and their luck might hold.

Then a dark shadow streaked over the ground ahead of them, on a course to intercept Bluestar at the head of her patrol. More shadows followed, and a furious yowling split the quiet of the night. For a heartbeat Bluestar quickened her pace, as if she thought she could outrun the challengers. Then she slowed to a stop. Her warriors did the same.

"Bluestar, why have you led your cats into ShadowClan territory?" Hissed a black tom. Waterlily tensed. It was the ShadowClan leader, Nightstar.

"It was the only way we could get to the Gathering in the floods." Bluestar replied. She kept her gaze with the old leader. "We mean no harm, Nightstar. You know there's a truce for the Gathering." She added.

Nightstar hissed, his ears flattened against his head and his fur bristling. "The truce holds at Fourtrees," He snarled. "There is no truce here."

"Nightstar, I'm sorry," Meowed Bluestar. "We would never trespass on your territory without good reason. Please let us pass."

Her words did nothing to appease the ShadowClan cats. Cinderfur, the ShadowClan deputy, moved up beside his leader, a dim shape in the moonlight. "I think they're here to spy," he growled softly.

"Spy?" Tigerclaw shouldered his way forward to stand next to Bluestar, his head thrust out toward Cinderfur until their noses were less than a mouse-length apart. "What can we spy on here? We're nowhere near your camp."

Cinderfur curled back his lip to reveal thorn-sharp teeth. "Give us

the word, Nightstar, and we'll tear them apart."

"You can try," growled Tigerclaw.

For a few heartbeats Nightstar was silent. Waterlily flattened her ears and let out a faint hiss. Fireheart's muscles tensed. Beside him, Graystripe growled low in his throat. Mousefur bared her teeth at the nearest ShadowClan warrior, and Sandstorm's pale golden eyes shone with readiness to fight.

"Keep back," Nightstar grunted at last to his warriors. "We'll let them pass. I want ThunderClan cats at the Gathering." Though his words were friendly, he hissed them through bared teeth. Nightstar narrowed his eyes, "We'll even give you an escort," Nightstar went on, "Just to make sure you get to Fourtrees safely. We wouldn't want ThunderClan to be scared off by an angry mouse, would we?"

A murmur of agreement rose from the ShadowClan warriors. They shifted so that they surrounded the ThunderClan cats on all sides. With a faint nod, Nightstar set off beside Bluestar. The other cats followed, the ShadowClan patrol matching ThunderClan step for step. ThunderClan headed for the Gathering completely encircled by their enemies. Waterlily felt fear rush through her whole body. They acted as if they couldn't find their own way to Fourtrees. She then narrowed her eyes to slits as she padded beside a ShadowClan cat. The stench alone could make her gag and she tried hard to keep her nose on the lookout for another smell.

Chapter Eighteen

The Gathering was one of the harshest ones Waterlily had ever been to. The leaders were getting ready to leap across the branches and fight one another. If Bluestar hadn't stepped in, the truce would have been broken. Nightstar had called them traitors for keeping Brokentail in their camp.

"How did you know we were keeping him inside our camp? Were you spying?" Bluestar had meowed.

"No, but your apprentices gossip pretty freely. One of my warriors overheard them." Nightstar replied. His eyes were narrowed to slits.

Waterlily shook her head to clear it. As she padded back into camp with the others, she was drenched in water. She tried to shake off the water droplets, but it clung to her body like they were hanging on for dear life. Yellowfang lifted her head as Waterlily padded into the medicine den.

"You're soaked." She softly growled.

"We had to go through RiverClan territory to come back here. Some of us fell into the river." She explained, circling around her nest. Yellowfang put her head back onto her paws and closed her eyes again. Waterlily settled down and curled into her nest, tucking her paws under her chest. She closed her eyes and let sleep take over.

Waterlily twitched her nose and fidgeted in her sleep. Then she jolted awake. It was still moon high and night still took over silverpelt. Her nose almost froze from the cold sensation of the wind that was beginning to blow her way. She blinked as a cold breeze blew into the den. It felt like a thousand bees came into to sting her eyes, but it quickly went away as she dug her face into her paws. She closed her eyes again and drifted to sleep once more.

The light of dawn took over the clearing and the snow was just barely visible. The snow that stayed, turned brown and mushy. The

breeze blew into Waterlily's nose and she sneezed, then she blinked in confusion. The air was warmer. The scent of water was also near. Had the flood come to ThunderClan? She opened her mouth to taste the air, but the scent of water was far. ThunderClan was safe.

Then suddenly the scent of fear filled the air. She quickly scrambled to her paws and widened her gaze as she saw Brackenpaw racing down the ravine and panting hard. "WindClan is attacking!" He yowled, "WindClan in ThunderClan territory. They're ready to fight about Brokentail being held here." He finished, barely able to run any further. He collapsed down, but he was steady. Waterlily raced to his side and lightly traced her tail over his back.

"How many?" Bluestar raced out of her den and Tigerclaw ran just beside her.

"I couldn't tell. Fireheart is there trying to defend them himself. I came here for help." Brackenpaw explained. He scrambled back up to his paws. He wasn't about to miss out on a fight with WindClan warriors.

"Are you fit to fight?" Asked, Bluestar, sensing his sudden change in energy.

Brackenpaw nodded, "WindClan cats don't scare me." He hissed.

"Tigerclaw and you four, come with me. The rest of you, stay here. I will get someone to call for help if we need." She ordered with a flick of her tail.

Brackenpaw then raced under the gorse tunnel and up the ravine with Bluestar and the others following close behind. All were ready to take on the fight. Their eyes were filled with rage in hopes to keep ThunderClan safe.

Waterlily trekked back into the medicine den and searched through the herb store for some comfrey, marigold, cobwebs and chervil. They were just barely out of marigold. Comfrey, and chervil they had plenty of. Perhaps that would be enough. Yellowfang was standing beside her, looking at the herb count as well.

"We need more marigold." Yellowfang rasped out loud.

Waterlily turned her head, "Can we do without it?"

Yellowfang slowly nodded her head. "We'll have to."

Waterlily then began pulling out the needed healing herbs and chewed some of the leaves into poultices making them ready for any battle-scarred warriors. Yellowfang did the same and put them into the neat piles Waterlily already had laying out.

She then began taking the large leaves and carefully picking off the stems and tearing the leaves into smaller pieces. Waterlily felt every hair on her pelt bristle from fear. Bluestar only sent out a few warriors, and the ones that stayed back paced the grounds. She could hear them breathing uneasily and low growls of frustration.

"We can't just stay here!" Darkstripe hissed.

"We must!" Runningwind growled back. "We can't race into fight and waste our energy."

"So we just sit here and wait for them to return like useless kits?" Darkstripe hissed again, his eyes blazing like fire.

Runningwind kept his gaze and said nothing for a short few moments then meowed, "We must stay here and defend our camp in case any WindClan warriors get past them."

Waterlily swiftly nodded at Runningwind's words. He spoke like a true warrior and knew better than to disobey Bluestar's orders. She padded out of the den and glanced at Darkstripe as she passed on by to get some fresh-kill. Darkstripe turned his amber gaze to her and narrowed his eyes. He must have known she was listening. His amber gaze made her feel uneasy. Then he finally looked back at Runningwind.

"Who made you Clan leader?" He growled, taking a step forward, and almost touching Runningwind's nose.

Runningwind was about to respond when Sandstorm raced in between them. "This must stop." She hissed, glancing at both of

them for a few short moments. Her bright green eyes showed satisfaction as the two tom's fur flattened and they both padded away in opposite directions.

Waterlily padded back with a small mouse in her jaws. She didn't meet Sandstorm's eyes, but she could feel her gaze as she passed by her. Her bristled fur and slightly widened eyes relaxed as she turned her back to Sandstorm and padded into the medicine den. Yellowfang didn't say anything or lift her head.

"Here." Waterlily mewed. She dropped the mouse in front of Yellowfang. The old she-cat looked up at her then straightened herself by sitting up. "It's for you," Waterlily added.

Yellowfang blinked her thanks, then ate the mouse in silence. "All this talk of battle," She rasped, in between bites. She swallowed a morsel, then continued, as she looked over at Waterlily sitting a few tail-lengths away, "Makes my bones ache. I sense it will not go well."

Chapter Nineteen

Bluestar and the warriors came running back into camp. The other warriors that stayed behind, guarding the camp, jumped to their paws and alerted their ears. They were quickly dissatisfied when Bluestar jumped up onto the highrock. "We are lucky to have won this battle." She began. All the cats gathered around her, including the queens, elders, kits and medicine cats.

"If it wasn't for you, we wouldn't be in this mess!" Growled a dark tabby tom.

"Hush, Darkstripe." Growled Bluestar. Her voice was harsh and Waterlily's ears flattened. She could feel Bluestar's anger welling up inside her. Did the battle not go to plan? Bluestar then continued in a cooler voice. "I knew coming into this would not be easy. But it is something I feel is right."

Darkstripe rolled his eyes. Tigerclaw, who was in the back of the Clan, padded up to the front and nudged Darkstripe. His eyes narrowed as he spoke. "This is your leader, Darkstripe. Show some respect." For a heartbeat Darkstripe glared at them both, then bowed his head. Tigerclaw swung his massive head, sweeping his amber gaze over all the cats.

Yellowfang then flicked her tail to Waterlily. "Come on, let's check them for wounds." She whispered. Waterlily swiftly nodded her head then padded into the crowd of cats checking for any scratches or wounds. Waterlily got to Fireheart. "Where's Graystripe?" She whispered.

Fireheart was about to respond when his old friend padded back into camp with prey in his mouth. Fireheart's tensed muscles relaxed. Waterlily pressed some cobwebs on his scratches, and one over his eye. Once she was done, he followed her back into the medicine den with Yellowfang close behind. Bluestar then padded up to Yellowfang. She seemed worried, but Yellowfang spoke first, not turning around.

"I've fought battles in my time, and I know, Bluestar," She then turned to the leader and faced her squarely, "thank you. It means a lot to me that you'd risk your Clan to protect Brokentail."

Bluestar shook her head. "There's no need for thanks, Yellowfang. It's a matter of honor. Despite what Brokentail has done, he deserves our compassion now."

The old medicine cat bowed her head. Softly, she mewed, "He has brought great danger to my adopted Clan, and for that, I am sorry."

Bluestar moved closer to her and gave her gray coat a comforting lick. For a moment the expression in her eyes was that of a mother soothing a frightened kit. Fireheart stared in astonishment. His pupils began to grow big. Waterlily glanced at him, trying to read his expressions and thoughts, but he showed only curiosity. Waterlily then glanced back at Yellowfang and Bluestar. Had they turned into badgers. They were still themselves.

Waterlily nudged Fireheart and looked at him with a worried glance, then tilted her head to the side. Fireheart just kept his wide gaze and slowly turned to Waterlily. He shook his head as if to clear it, then blinked at her with confusion. "I just... uh." He paused for a moment, looking back at Bluestar, "Discovered something."

Waterlily didn't take her concern look off her face. "We can talk about it tonight." She mewed softly. Fireheart dipped his head then bounded out of the camp after Bluestar, then he veered towards Graystripe. Waterlily didn't interfere and went back to treating any cats that still needed treated.

"Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey gather beneath highrock for a clan meeting." Called Bluestar.

Waterlily lifted her head from applying some of the last marigold to Whitestorm's shoulder. "I'll be fine." Whitestorm purred. Then he padded out into the clearing. Waterlily followed the old white tom and sat a few tail-lengths beside him. She glanced over and saw Fireheart and Graystripe come up from Bluestar's den. She twitched her ear, then settled down, wrapping her plump tail over her front paws.

Tigerclaw came out from the warriors den and sat just beside the highrock. He sat tall and proud, looking at the others coming out of their dens and into the clearing. Waterlily looked back at the nursery to see if Shadowkit was peeking outside the brambles, but no one was there. She slumped a bit, then squared her shoulders back to face Bluestar.

When they had gathered around Bluestar, she meowed, "Brackenpaw, come here."

Brackenpaw looked up, surprised, and padded nervously over to Bluestar. He almost thought he did something wrong until Bluestar began to speak.

"Brackenpaw, it was you who warned the Clan today, and you fought bravely in the battle," Bluestar meowed. "It is time for you to become a warrior." The apprentice's mouth fell open. His eyes blazed with excitement as Bluestar announced the ritual words.

"I, Bluestar, leader of ThunderClan, call upon my warrior ancestors to look down on this apprentice. He has trained hard to understand the ways of your noble code, and I commend him to you as a warrior in his turn." She fixed her blue gaze on Brackenpaw. "Brackenpaw, do you promise to uphold the warrior code and to protect and defend this Clan, even at the cost of your life?"

Brackenpaw trembled slightly, but his voice was steady as he meowed, "I do."

"Then by the powers of StarClan, I give you your warrior name. Brackenpaw, from this moment you will be known as Brackenfur. StarClan honors your forethought and your determination, and we welcome you as a full warrior of ThunderClan."

When she finished speaking Bluestar stepped up to Brackenfur and rested her muzzle on his bowed head. Brackenfur licked her shoulder respectfully, then walked over to stand between Fireheart and Graystripe.

The watching cats raised their voices to chant the new warrior's name. "Brackenfur! Brackenfur!" They began to press around him,

congratulating him and wishing him well. Frostfur, his mother, padded out toward him. She pressed her muzzle against his flank, while her dark blue eyes glowed with delight.

Waterlily watched in awe, then saw a flicker of a gray pelt at the corner of her eye. It was Cinderpaw padding over to her brother. "Brackenfur." She meowed, "Congratulations."

Waterlily then watched his sister strike up the courage when she should have been a warrior sitting next to him.

"You should have been with me." Brackenfur mewed. He hung his head low and didn't meet her in the eyes.

Cinderpaw shook her head. "No. You deserve this."

"And so do you."

"I am fine as is." She retorted, getting slightly annoyed with his sympathy. She wasn't completely useless. She did, however, feel a bit jealous of her brother, but knew she wasn't ready to be a full warrior. Fireheart still had quite a bit of training to do with her.

A flame-colored pelt padded behind Waterlily, and made her jump. "Fireheart, you scared me." She softly growled.

"Sorry." He whispered. "It's Bluestar. I think I've discovered something about her that I shouldn't have." He confessed, not taking his gaze away from Waterlily's. Fear flickered in Waterlily's eyes, but she did not blink. Whatever it was that Bluestar was hiding must not be told to anyone else.

Chapter Twenty

Waterlily grabbed a small pile of herbs she had gathered earlier that day and set them a few tail-lengths away from the herb store. Just a few more pieces needed to be picked apart, then it would be ready. She suddenly pricked her ears and lifted her head. Fear swelled in her throat, and her ears flattened. Something was wrong. She raced out into the den and saw Fireheart pelting towards her. He stopped just a whisker away and panted hard before speaking.

"It's Graystripe and Silverstream." He meowed, still trying to catch his breath. "Follow me." He pelted back up the ravine and out of the gorse tunnel. Waterlily dropped her herbs and raced after him just a tail-length behind. She struggled to keep up, but kept going until he finally stopped just at the border of RiverClan and ThunderClan. Waterlily saw a pregnant she-cat laying on her side, and breathing heavily. She looked up at Fireheart, her eyes wide with confusion.

"Please help her." It was Graystripe who pleaded. He fixed his gaze on her; his eyes filled with worry and plead.

Waterlily softly nodded, then looked down at the she-cat. Her belly was swollen and pain struct through her and her belly rippled. The powerful rippling down her body had ebbed away into weak spasms. She had stopped wailing. Waterlily quickly went to her side and sniffed the silver queen.

"Fireheart!" Growled a tom.

Fireheart laid his ears flat and looked back. It was a dark tabby tom. *Tigerclaw*. Waterlily looked up at her heart began racing, but Fireheart shook his head and fixed his eyes back on the suffering queen. Lots of blood began pouring out her and a small bundle spilled out. Waterlily quickly grabbed it then put in front of Fireheart. "Lick it clean." She ordered, then went back and said some reassuring words to the silver she-cat. "It's okay, Silverstream. You're almost done."

Silverstream's sides rippled again and she let out a loud yowl in pain. Tigerclaw then came down from the rock and was standing in the mouth of the gully with a look of thunder on his face. "That's a RiverClan cat," he hissed. "Will one of you tell me what's going on?"

Waterlily, nor Fireheart responded. She kept her gaze and attention to Silverstream. Finally another kit slipped out. "You've done it!" She praised. She picked the kit up and dropped it in front of Tigerclaw.

Tigerclaw lifted his paw and hissed in exasperation. "What am I, am a medicine cat?"

"You have a tongue, don't you?" Waterlily hissed back, her eyes blazing like wildfire. "Make yourself useful and lick the kit clean." She ordered.

The dark tabby bowed his huge head and began to lick the second kit, reluctantly.

Waterlily looked up at Graystripe with sorrow in her eyes. "I have no herbs with me. I'm afraid I don't have much time."

Graystripe rose to his paws. "What do you mean, no time?" He growled.

"She isn't doing well, Graystripe... I'm sorry, but you-"

"No! Just try!" He hissed, "Save her. What herb do you need?"

Waterlily couldn't look at the long-haired tom. "It's chervil. It's found in snakerocks. We are far from it." She confessed.

"What does it look like?" Graystripe demanded.

Before Waterlily was able to respond, Silverstream's body gave a massive shudder. Her head fell back, her paws jerked, and she was still. Waterlily gasped and pressed her ear against SIlverstream's flank. She didn't want to believe the she-cat was dead, but she couldn't hide the facts. Silverstream stopped breathing. Waterlily looked up at Graystripe with sympathy in her eyes.

"No!" Graystripe yowled. "No, Silverstream!" He wailed, putting his nose down onto her flank.

"I'm sorry." Waterlily whispered. She closed her eyes tightly, and bowed her head. Fireheart then padded beside her and nudged her comfortingly.

"The kits are safe." Fireheart meowed, trying to sound positive.

"This is my fault." She murmured, looking down at the pretty silver she-cat.

The rocks were still echoing to Graystripe's dreadful wailing. Tigerclaw appeared, scrambling past the other cats, and reached out a massive paw to cuff the gray warrior behind the ear. "Stop that moaning."

Graystripe stopped and fell silent, but kept his head low. *He would be mourning for moons.* Waterlily thought.

Tigerclaw glared around at all of them. "Now will some cat tell me what's going on? Graystripe, do you know this RiverClan cat?"

Graystripe looked up. His eyes had gone dull and cold, like pebbles. "I loved her," He whispered.

"What—these are your kits?" Tigerclaw seemed stunned.

"Mine and Silverstream's." A faint spark of defiance kindled in Graystripe. "I know what you'll say, Tigerclaw. Don't bother. I don't care." He turned back to Silverstream, pressing his nose against her fur and murmuring softly to her.

The ThunderClan deputy scoffed, but didn't say anything more.

Waterlily took a kit in her mouth padded closer to Tigerclaw and Fireheart. "We must get going back to camp. These kits won't last long without some milk."

"You really think we're going to raise two half-clan cats?" Tigerclaw growled.

Waterlily dropped the kit gently in between her forepaws then looked up and glared at Tigerclaw. "We are not letting the kits die, Tigerclaw. No one is that fox hearted, not even you." She picked the small kit again and trekked back through Sunningrocks and back to camp.

Fireheart picked up the other kit and followed her in silence. Graystripe stayed behind, still in silence over the dead she-cat he had once loved more than anything. Tigerclaw glanced at him, then padded after them with narrowed eyes.

Once they got back into camp, almost every cat knew what had happened and how Graystripe betrayed his own Clan. Bluestar greeted them politely, though Waterlily knew she was disappointed in Graystripe and what he had done.

Waterlily let Bluestar handle it from there. She padded over to the medicine den to gather some herbs for the two kits once they get settled into their nests. She had doubts if the Clan would accept them, but they had to. They were Graystripe's kits no matter who the mother was.

Chapter Twenty One

Dawn took over the camp, making it a bright orange that laid over the trees and grass. Snow was completely melted and the cold began to warm up. Waterlily laid silently in her nest, her head resting on her forepaws. She was awake almost all night and couldn't sleep.

Yellowfang blinked open her eyes and stretched out her front legs, then her back. She yawned, then padded over to Waterlily. She could sense something was wrong and sat down, licking her paw, then swiping it over her face. "It wasn't your fault." She meowed softly.

Waterlily didn't look up at her mentor. She couldn't meet her eyes. "I killed her." She meowed, closing her eyes tightly. "If I had the herbs, I could have saved her."

"No one could have." Yellowfang rasped, lowering her head and licking Waterlily between the ears. "Get some rest today and get yourself something to eat."

Waterlily knew she was right, and she reluctantly got to her paws and padded over to the fresh-kill pile. It was freshly stocked and it was piled high. She took a small mouse, then padded slowly back to the medicine den. She was stopped by Fireheart as she was just a few tail-lengths away.

"Waterlily," He meowed softly, "You aren't to blame."

Waterlily dropped her mouse and narrowed her eyes, "It was my fault, Fireheart." She looked down at her paws, "I just need to be alone today." She murmured.

Fireheart dipped his head then bounded off towards the nursery. Waterlily watched him go and longed to see how the kits were doing. *The nursery must be pretty full.* She thought, but dared not to go in there until tomorrow. Yellowfang told her to lay low, and that was exactly what she was going to do. She picked up her mouse

again and padded over to the sunniest spot in the clearing and laid down, crossing her paws over the mouse before taking small mouth fulls of it.

She watched as the Clan became up and around. Tigerclaw padded out into the clearing and assigned two patrols - one near the ShadowClan's border and the other near RiverClan's border by the lake. Runningwind, Dustpelt, Mousefur and Whitestorm were the first to go. The two apprentices, Thornpaw and Brightpaw followed after then. Then they were followed by Longtail, and Willowpelt. Swiftpaw followed close beside his mentor.

"Willowpelt." Meowed Tigerclaw, "You and Darkstripe can get a hunting patrol going. I'll join once I'm done here."

Willowpelt dipped her head to the Clan deputy then padded to the warriors den to fetch Darkstripe.

Waterlily finished her mouse, and continued to watch in silence. Graystripe was still in the warriors den and he probably wouldn't come out for a whole moon. Without Silverstream he felt like he was just a nuisance to the Clan by mourning for her.

Fireheart wriggled out of the nursery and padded out into the clearing, stopping near Willowpelt and Darkstripe. "May I join you?"

Darkstripe wanted to decline the offer, but Willowpelt beat him to it and spoke first. "Of course. Is Cinderpaw joining us as well?"

Fireheart nodded, "I'll just get her and we can go." He meowed, then bounded towards the apprentices' den.

Waterlily stopped listening and laid her head on her paws, pushing the left over mouse bones aside. She sighed softly, and just stared out in the distance, thinking.

"Do you want to come hunting with us?" Fireheart meowed.

Waterlily looked up, her eyes wide with embarrassment. She was thinking so hard she didn't even see Fireheart approaching her. Waterlily blinked up at him in amusement. "I can't hunt." She confessed.

"Sure you can." He meowed, "Come on. You trained as an apprentice before." He added.

"I..." She paused, not knowing if she should leave the camp. She wouldn't be doing anything wrong, would she? She shook her head. "I mustn't leave camp." She retorted coolly.

Fireheart flicked his tail. "You'll love it. It'll do you some good." He purred.

Waterlily sighed then got to her paws and nodded her head silently. She remembered hunting with Runningwind, but she would be very rusty. She followed Fireheart and the others reluctantly.

"I think we can find some prey just beside the roots in Sunningrocks." Meowed Fireheart.

Darkstripe hissed, but didn't object out loud. Fireheart knew very well that Darkstripe would not agree to anything he said, but he didn't care.

Waterlily tensed at the word, Sunningrocks. That was where Silverstream had died. She stayed silent, as they all followed Fireheart through the sandy hollow and up the stream that led to Sunningrocks. Waterlily could feel her heart racing. She didn't want to be here. Why did Fireheart bring her here of all places?

"Okay, here should be fine." Fireheart paused for a moment, then looked at Waterlily. He could feel her pain, but he knew prey would be running well here. He padded over to her and laid his tail over her shoulders. "Just do what I do." He added, softly.

Darkstripe narrowed his eyes, "She's a medicine cat, Fireheart. She can't hunt."

Waterlily felt rage bubbling in her body. She had to show him that she could be a warrior if she wanted to. She turned to Fireheart, narrowed her eyes, "I'm not an apprentice. I know how to hunt." She spat.

Cinderpaw flinched from her words. *Why was she being so edgy?* She looked up at Fireheart with worry flickering in her eyes, but

Fireheart kept his gaze with Waterlily. His eyes were soft. He knew she meant no harm in her words.

"Not with all the racket you're making." Hissed Darkstripe.

Waterlily didn't respond. She glared at him, her eyes burning with fury and determination to prove herself. Then she relaxed realizing that she shouldn't have to prove herself. She was worthy of being anything and she chose to be a medicine cat. That was her destiny. Not being a warrior.

She padded a few steps towards some trees that lined the edge of the Sunningrocks, then sniffed the air. She could smell an abundance of herbs. Chickweed was the most powerful that stung her nose. Then the scent of dock plunged at her nose. She shook her head to clear it, then looked up at Fireheart with defeat in her eyes. "All I smell is herbs." She confessed.

"Try closing your eyes and smelling again." He urged her on.

Darkstripe sat in silence, but Waterlily could sense his tension rising in annoyance and impatience. She took a deep breath then closed her eyes, letting all her senses kick in. She opened her jaws to taste the air and could taste the tanginess juices from dock leaves. *No, mouse-brain.* She told herself silently. *You must try and find some prey*. She softly took another deep breath and finally her senses opened up and she could smell something sweet. She quickly opened her eyes and saw a small mouse scurrying to the nearest bush. She crouched down and crawled slowly toward it, her eyes fixed on the mouse.

"Mouse dung!" She spat. The mouse got away from her paws and she padded back beside Fireheart. "I'm not cut out to be a warrior." She mewed softly, closing her eyes in defeat again.

Chapter Twenty Two

Rain poured down, making the ground wet and soggy. It was a couple of sunrises after Silverstream had passed and Waterlily was doing a bit better. She was coping by sorting through herbs and counting. Yellowfang felt a little annoyed because they didn't need to be sorted every single day, but she knew it helped her get her mind off of Silverstream.

"Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey, gather here beneath the highrock for a clan meeting." Called the familiar voice of Bluestar.

Yellowfang flicked her tail and Waterlily bounded after her. They both sat down at the edge of the clearing and kept their tail neatly over their front paws. Waterlily hung her head low, still thinking of Silverstream.

"Cats of ThunderClan." Bluestar began, rising up to her paws. "I have called you all here today for two reasons. One good and one bad." She paused for a heart beat glancing over at Graystripe. Graystripe was sitting next to Fireheart. Then she continued, "Many of you remember the night Silverstream lost her life to Graystripe's kits."

Murmurs of hostility rose from the Clan. Graystripe crouched down and slunk into the ground, his ears flat on his head. Fireheart pressed up against him to try and comfort him.

"Many cats have asked me what Graystripe's punishment will be," Bluestar went on. "I have thought carefully on this, and I have decided that Silverstream's death is punishment enough. What could any cat do to him that is worse than what he has already suffered?"

Yowls of disapproval ripped through the crowd of cats. Waterlily glanced over at Graystripe. He sat up a little straighter and bowed his head in respect. "Thank you, Bluestar." He meowed softly.

"Don't thank me." She replied, coldly. "Just work hard and be loyal to the Clan. When those kits are old enough, you will be a fine mentor to them." She turned her head and faced the rest of the Clan, ignoring the angry remarks that were made. "Now to go onto a happier duty of mine." She purred, sitting up straighter. "Cinderpaw, please come forward."

Cinderpaw widened her eyes, making them big and round. She was in complete shock. She looked over at Fireheart for approval. He just nodded approvingly. She padded over to Bluestar and stopped in front of the highrock. Bluestar leaped down and looked Cinderpaw in the eyes.

"I, Bluestar, leader of ThunderClan, call upon my warrior ancestors to look down on this apprentice. She has trained hard to understand the ways of your noble code, and I commend her to you as a warrior in her turn." She paused for a brief moment as if to think, then continued, "Cinderpaw do you promise to uphold the warrior code and to protect and defend your Clan, even at the cost of your life?"

Cinderpaw could hardly believe what she was hearing. Her heart began racing and she almost didn't say the words she knew she must say. "I do." She mewed. She steadied her paws and dug her claws into the ground so she wouldn't accidentally fall over.

"Then by the powers of StarClan, I give you your warrior name. Cinderpaw, from this moment on you will be known as Cinderpelt. StarClan honors your bravery and love for others, and we welcome you as a full warrior of ThunderClan."

"Cinderpelt! Cinderpelt!" Brackenfur's mew was the loudest above everyone else. He was made a warrior before her, and now she could finally be with him once again in the warriors' den. It would be just like old times.

Bluestar rested her muzzle on Cinderpelt's head. Cinderpelt licked her shoulder in response just like she saw Brackenfur do. "You will sit vigil tonight." Mewed Bluestar, her eyes shining in delight. Bluestar leaped back onto the highrock and rose her head to the Clan once more. "We also have a kit that is ready to become an

apprentice." She purred.

Waterlily's clouded eyes of sadness finally were relieved and filled with happiness. Cinderpelt was finally a warrior, just like she always wanted.

"Cloudkit, please come forward." Bluestar called, looking over at the nursery.

Waterlily started to not listen to the rest of the meeting. She was deep in thought of how she was able to save Cinderpelt, but not a kitting queen. She shook her head to clear it then blinked back up at Bluestar.

"Fireheart will be your mentor." Bluestar meowed.

"So soon?" It was Longtail who objected to her choice.

"Silence." Hissed Bluestar. "I have chose Fireheart because they share the same common factor of once being a kittypet. He can teach Cloudpaw on how to become a loyal warrior of our Clan just like he did."

Waterlily tilted her head to the side. *If Cinderpelt wasn't ready to become a warrior, would Cloudpaw have had a different mentor*? Then she got into deeper thoughts. *What if Cinderpelt was only made a warrior because she was still Fireheart's apprentice and Bluestar wanted him as Cloudpaw's mentor?*

Yellowfang glanced at her. Her eyes filled with worry as well. Waterlily knew at that point, she was not the only one who thought Cinderpelt might have been made a warrior a little too soon. This is something that Cinderpelt must never find out.

Chapter Twenty Three

Waterlily slipped out of the medicine den. Her mind was keeping her awake. The moonlight was just a sliver under a full moon. Silverpelt was still black with bits of starlight dancing in the sky. Her long-haired, calico, fur ruffled from a slight wind. She opened her mouth to taste the fresh air and a familiar scent rose in her nostrils. She sniffed again, trying to identify who the cat was she was smelling.

She padded a few steps further into the clearing and peered around the medicine den. She saw and heard nothing. She sniffed again, but the scent was still there. She stayed silent and still, and pricked her ears, finding just a faint whisper a fox-length away.

"You are still Brokenstar." Whispered a tom. "You can still get back at them."

Waterlily widened her eyes and padded lightly away, hoping they didn't hear her. She could still hear their muffled mews, but didn't dare to listen to anymore. She had all the information she needed even if she didn't know exactly which cat it may have been. She had one lucky guess as to who the tom might have been. She narrowed her eyes to slits and padded into the clearing acting as if she just woke up. The fresh-kill pile wasn't quite stocked yet, so she padded back tiredly into the medicine den.

Yellowfang blinked opened her eyes and yawned, stretching out her paws. "You're up early." She rasped.

"Couldn't sleep much more." Waterlily mewed, not taking her mind off of what Tigerclaw could be plotting with Brokentail.

Yellowfang sighed then scrambled to her paws. She yawned again, then shook out her fur. "You look troubled." She mewed, tilting her head slightly to the side.

"I can't talk about it now." She retorted quickly, hanging head her low. She then looked up at silverpelt peering out of the entrance of

the cave walls. The dawn light was beginning to come out and it made the sky orange. Her pelt glowed in the sunlight as it came in through the trees. To Waterlily's relief, Yellowfang didn't press for any more answers. The old she-cat just sat in silence washing her chest fur with brief licks.

The Clan began waking up as normal and a dawn patrol was beginning to be in order. Tigerclaw assigned Brackenfur, Darkstripe, and Sandstorm out for the first patrol, then Dustpelt, Longtail and Willowpelt were to go out on the next one. The rest of the clan was out hunting since prey was running pretty well.

Waterlily stayed in camp almost all morning. She collected a few herbs just outside the camp, but she kept her mind busy by sorting and chewing leaves.

"Take a break." Rasped Yellowfang as she padded into the den with some yarrow in her jaws. "You've been sorting all morning. Get something to eat and then you can go collect herbs if you wish." She added, putting down the yarrow.

Waterlily dipped her head then padded over to the fresh-kill pile which was now stocked pretty high. She chose a vole then ate it just a few fox-lengths away and in the warm sun.

Cloudpaw trekked into the camp and immediately called to Bluestar. Bluestar leaped down from her den and padded into the clearing to Cloudpaw. "What is it, Cloudpaw?" She meowed, noticing Fireheart was not with him.

"RiverClan cats are coming. Fireheart says they are not coming attack." He mewed.

Bluestar dipped her head, "Thank you Cloudpaw for telling me this." Bluestar dismissed the apprentice as Fireheart approached with the newcomers. "Take your fresh-kill to the elders." She added.

Cloudpaw looked disappointed to be sent away, but he went without protest.

Leopardfur, the RiverClan deputy, walked up to Bluestar and dipped

her head respectfully. Mistyfoot and Stonefur stood beside her. "Bluestar, we come to your camp in peace," She began. "There's something we must discuss."

Bluestar didn't take her gaze away from the deputy. Tigerclaw came up from behind her and narrowed his eyes to slits. "You are not in charge of punishing Graystripe." He growled.

"We are not here to punish anyone." It was Mistyfoot who responded. She narrowed her eyes, but kept her cool. "We came here for the kits." She added.

Bluestar tilted her head to the side, "Why?"

"They are to be raised in the Clan their mother was born." Mistyfoot mewed. "If Silverstream lived, they would be with her."

Fireheart took a pace forward and couldn't help but interrupt, his voice shaking, "The kits is all Graystripe has left of her."

"Silence." Bluestar hissed. "This doesn't concern you."

Fireheart narrowed his eyes and they blazed like fire, "It is my concern." He growled. "He is my friend."

"Silence!" Hissed Tigerclaw. "Does your leader have to tell you twice? Graystripe is a traitor to his Clan. He has no right to the kits, or anything else."

Rage flooded through Fireheart. *Had Tigerclaw no respect for Graystripe's terrible grief?* He whirled on the deputy, held back from springing at him only because cats of another Clan were looking on. Tigerclaw bared his teeth in a snarl.

Bluestar flicked her tail angrily at both of them. "Enough!" she ordered. "Leopardfur, the kits are small and weak. They can't travel yet, especially across the river. It's too dangerous."

Waterlily looked back at the nursery. Bluestar was right. They were still small and weak. They would die in seconds in the river. She turned her head back to the arguing cats, curiously wondering what Bluestar will do.

Leopardfur narrowed her eyes, angrily, but stayed calm ."You are just making excuses." She hissed.

"No," Bluestar insisted. "Not excuses. Would you risk the kits' lives? I'll think about what you have said and discuss it with my warriors, and give you our answer at the next Gathering."

Leopardfur hesitated, as if she would have liked to say more, but it was clear that Bluestar had dismissed her. After a few tense moments, she dipped her head again and turned to go, with Mistyfoot and Stonefur behind her. Tigerclaw trailed after them as far as the gorse tunnel, then he turned back, heading for the clearing.

They had until the Gathering to make a decision, but how far will RiverClan cats go for half-clan kits? Waterlily tensed her muscles, imagining a battle break out if they were to say no to them. Then she shook her head to clear it. *No. It won't come to that. Bluestar will know what to say.*

Chapter Twenty Four

The camp was almost left empty. Only a few warriors were left in camp. It seemed almost too quiet for Waterlily's liking. She began pacing the floors of the medicine den and Yellowfang hissed in annoyance. "Make yourself useful Waterlily and go get some chervil. We used the last to help with Silverstream's kits."

Waterlily stopped pacing and dipped her head quickly to her mentor, then bounded out into the clearing. She headed for the gorse tunnel and was about to squeeze through when she saw Tigerclaw running toward her. She quickly got out of the way and stared, horrified as rogues raced after him.

"ThunderClan is under attack!" Tigerclaw yowled.

Fireheart was not too far behind with Cloudpaw on his heels.

Waterlily raced after them and leaped onto one of the rogue cats. He was a large, silver tabby tom and she raked her claws on his flank, making him roll over onto her. She shook off the debri from her fur and she growled, narrowing her eyes. The tom leaped at her, but she was too fast for him and she raced around him, then pulled his tail. He almost lost his balance, but whirled around and slashed a forepaw against her face. Waterlily let out a shriek and she hissed, furiously.

"You will not win, medicine cat." The silver tom growled.

Waterlily didn't know how he knew she was a medicine cat, but there was no time for chatting. She curled her lip into a snarl and leaped onto him again. He dodged to the side. She landed awkwardly with a big oof, then whirled around before he could grab her tail. She raked her claws against his cheek, then pinned him down. She dug her claws into his flank and he went limp for just a few moments. Waterlily let the tom go thinking he was done for, but he turned on her and pinned her down. He raked her belly and she screeched in horror. This tom was too strong for her to try

and kick off.

Fireheart raced toward her and leaped onto the tom. He knocked him over that sent him flying just a few tail-lengths away. It was enough for Waterlily to leap to her paws. He pelted back towards the ThunderClan cats, but Fireheart was too quick. He rolled over like a snake so quickly and let the rogue tom topple over him as he raked his hind claws against his soft belly. The rogue went flying across the clearing and he was left laying there for a few heartbeats before scrambling to his paws. His shoulders and flank were gouged and blood poured out from both wounds. He dared not to come back and fight Fireheart.

"Thank you." Meowed Waterlily, panting. "I'm not used to fighting."

"It's alright." He purred, rubbing her cheek. "You did well." He dipped his head then bounded towards the others that were still fighting. Patrols had come back and drove the rogues out. Then she saw him pelt towards Bluestar's den. She pricked her ears and raced towards the medicine den. Yellowfang was treating Whitestorm with a big gash on his shoulder.

"Waterlily," She mewed, not looking up from applying the poultice. She then looked up once she finished and saw Waterlily troubled. "What is it?"

"It's Tigerclaw." She meowed, trying to catch her breath. "I believe he's the one who did this."

Yellowfang tilted her head. "Nonsense." She rasped, "Now get going on treating any cats that need it."

Waterlily flattened her ears then padded away back outside of the medicine den. "Wait." Yellowfang yelled behind her. "Let me fix up your scratches before you go." Waterlily let her patch her scratches in silence then pricked her ears, impatiently. Something was wrong. She could feel it.

Warriors outside the den were still fighting furiously and many of the ThunderClan cats were wounded badly. Waterlily went around treating them as best as she could. Luckily no one was bleeding too

bad. Waterlily felt exhausted and wanted to just collapse on the forest grounds and sleep until the battle was over. Her feet were burning as she ran around camp treating any wounds and hoping they were well enough to go back fighting. They were losing terribly.

Just when Waterlily thought she couldn't do anymore, she saw flashes of cats fleeing toward them. They were RiverClan cats. She leaped to her paws and watched in dismay. *Were they here to help?* The RiverClan warriors fled into fight the rogues. They were not battle-scarred and were full of energy.

The fight was finally over. The rogues fled out of camp. All who was left was Brokentail and Tigerclaw. Both were bleeding from head to toe. Waterlily stood in astonishment what all had just happened. She looked over at Bluestar. She seemed shook, but she stabled herself enough to speak with the RiverClan warriors. *Does she finally believe Fireheart and Waterlily of all the treacheries of Tigerclaw?*

"How did you know we needed help?" Meowed Fireheart, taking a step forward.

"We didn't." Mewed Mistyfoot. "We came to speak with Bluestar about..." "

"Not now," Leopardfur interrupted. "ThunderClan needs time to recover." She dipped her head graciously toward Fireheart. "We are glad to have helped. We will return soon."

"Thank you." Bluestar dipped her head in response then turned to Fireheart. "Thank you, Fireheart. I owe all my thanks to you." She leaped up into the highrock. Her haunches were shaking uncontrollably, but she stood straight and spoke to the Clan slowly. "I present to you, Tigerclaw, now our prisoner..."

"Isn't he your deputy?" It was Longtail who questioned her.

"I will tell you." She hissed, glaring at the battle-scarred tom. Then she continued, "Tigerclaw was going to attack me in my den. If it wasn't for Fireheart, he may have succeeded in killing me."

Waterlily tensed. She was right. It was Tigerclaw and Brokentail that had planned this. Now that Bluestar knew about the old deputy and what he was capable of. Waterlily wondered what would happen next. Bluestar kept speaking to the Clan, but Waterlily searched her clanmates. Bluestar had to choose a new deputy my moonhigh. Waterlily didn't know could be trustworthy now in their clan, but she did know that Whitestorm was probably the best choice. He was an honorable warrior and knew the Clan very well.

"Tigerclaw," Waterlily heard Bluestar's mew pierce through her thoughts. "No more of this. Go now."

Tigerclaw drew himself up to his full height, his eyes blazing in cold fury. "I'm going. But I'll be back; you can be sure of that. I'll be revenged on you all!" He padded unevenly away from the Highrock. As he drew close to Fireheart then paused, drawing his lips back in a snarl. "And as for you..." He hissed. "Keep your eyes open, Fireheart. Keep your ears pricked. Keep looking behind you. Because one day I'll find you, and then you'll be crowfood."

Waterlily saw the fury in Fireheart's eyes. She stood her ground, ready to defend her old friend, but Tigerclaw then padded away before Fireheart could respond.

Tigerclaw raced through the crowd of cats and they let him pass in silence, then they all turned back to their leader, wondering what they were to do now.

And then the words Waterlily knew everyone was questioning came out from one of the warriors behind her. "Who will be deputy now?"

Chapter Twenty Five

Waterlily bounded back towards the medicine den and saw Yellowfang standing over Brokentail. She looked up at Waterlily as she neared the entrance and her eyes clouded with pain. Waterlily padded to her side and nudged her, comfortingly. "I know." She mewed softly.

Yellowfang didn't respond. She pushed some bright red berries to him. "Eat these." She demanded.

Brokentail lapped one up and began chewing. Yellowfang stood watching him with a face like stone. "You and my Clan cast me out and I came here," she hissed into his ear. "I was a prisoner, just like you. But ThunderClan treated me well, and at last they trusted me enough to be their medicine cat. You could have earned their trust, too. But now, no cat will ever trust you again."

Brokentail let out a contemptuous hiss. "Do you think I care?"

Yellowfang crouched even closer to him, her eyes gleaming. "I know you care for nothing, Brokentail. Not your Clan, nor your honor, nor your own kin."

"I have no kin." Brokentail spat out the words.

"Wrong. Your kin has been closer to you than you ever dreamed. I'm your mother, Brokentail."

The blind warrior made a curious rasping noise in his throat, like a terrible attempt at laughter. "Spiders have spun webs in your brain, old one. Medicine cats never have kits."

"That's why I had to give you up," Yellowfang told him, "But I never stopped caring...never. When you were a young warrior, I was so proud of you." Her voice dropped to a low snarl. "And then you murdered Raggedstar. Your own father. You killed kits of our Clan, and made me take the blame. You would have destroyed our Clan

completely. So now it is time to put an end to all this treachery."

"An end? What do you mean, you old..." Brokentail tried to rise to his paws, but his legs gave way and he fell heavily onto his side. His voice rose to a thin screech. "What have you done? I can't...can't feel my paws. Can't breathe..."

"I fed you deathberries." Yellowfang's eyes were mere slits as she gazed at him. "I know this is your last life, Brokentail. Medicine cats always know. Now no cat will ever be hurt again because of you."

Brokentail's jaws parted in a cry of shock and fear. His limbs thrashed and his paws scrabbled in the dust; his chest heaved as he fought for air. Then he collapsed to the ground and stopped breathing all in all. Waterlily could hear pawsteps back away just before the old leader died, but she didn't take her eyes off of him. She stood in silence at the limp body. Then she turned to Yellowfang.

Yellowfang glanced up at her, her eyes still clouded with pain and fury. "No one must know." She hissed, cooly.

Waterlily dipped her head, then padded outside of the den. Yellowfang padded after to tell Bluestar of Brokentail's death. She was to tell Bluestar that he was too injured and Yellowfang couldn't save him.

Waterlily let Yellowfang deal with her son's death and she padded over to Fireheart. "You did everything right." She purred. "You saved the Clan. Just like the prophecy said."

Fireheart dipped his head in acceptance, but he wasn't convinced. "Thanks, Waterlily." He purred, softly. His eyes clouded with grief. Waterlily could feel his pain like a boulder had gotten inside his soul and was crushing him from the inside.

Waterlily stared at him, sharing his sympathy for a few more moments, then she looked up at Silverpelt. "Do you think Tigerclaw meant what he said?"

Fireheart looked up at her in dismay as if he was searching for an

excuse to say no. He just shook his head slowly. "I do not know. I just hope that he doesn't ever come back."

Waterlily flicked her tail, uneasily. "I'm afraid, Fireheart." She mewed, her voice cracking and shaking. She could feel her heart bursting with questions.

Fireheart didn't say anything else. He pressed his warm body against hers and rested his muzzle on her shoulder. "You're a great medicine cat." He purred.

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The sky was dark, and the stars above danced within the moonlight. Waterlily padded up to Bluestar's den. Bluestar lay by the corner of her den. She was curled up and didn't respond when Waterlily had announced herself. Rotted bones fumed Waterlily's nostrils and she wrinkled her nose in disgust. "You must choose a deputy before it's too late." She urged. "It's time."

"Why?" Hissed Bluestar. She scrambled to her paws and narrowed her eyes. She sat back on her haunches like she was ready to spring at any moment. "So my deputy can betray me again?"

"No." Waterlily protested. She dug her claws deep into the earth keeping herself steady. "All here is trustworthy."

"Why couldn't StarClan have just told me themselves?" She growled. Her eyes were now slits and she felt rage building up inside her. "I should have died." She confessed, dropping her gaze, and hanging her head low.

Waterlily took a small pace forward. "StarClan doesn't always give us the answers. Not even medicine cats."

"I revoke my belief in StarClan." She almost yowled it so loud, Waterlily was sure the whole Clan had heard her. It echoed deep into the cave walls and made Waterlily jump with alarm.

"You can't mean that!" Waterlily softly growled.

"I can and I will." Bluestar looked up at her, her eyes narrowing

once more. "Bring me Fireheart." She meowed softly.

Waterlily dipped her head then bounded away. She leaped down and scanned the clearing. Fireheart was licking his scratches just by the nursery. She had guessed that he was talking with his friend, Graystripe. She trekked over to him and swiftly nodded her head. "Bluestar wishes to see you." She meowed.

Fireheart looked up at her. His tongue was hanging out and looked as if he was going to protest, but he got up and followed her to Bluestar's den. Waterlily stopped at the entrance and let Fireheart go in himself. Bluestar probably wanted to speak with him alone.

Waterlily padded back down and sat at the edge of the clearing just beside Bluestar's den. She wrapped her tail over her front paws and waited for Bluestar's next orders.

"Waterlily!" She heard the voice call her. She pricked her ears and heard the voice again. *It was Fireheart.* She quickly scrambled up to the den and sat down beside Fireheart.

"Help me convince her she needs to appoint a deputy by moonhigh." He meowed softly in her ear.

"Bluestar." Waterlily dipped her head.

Bluestar didn't respond. She just flattened her ears and cowered down like a kit would if they were depressed about not being able to play outside.

"Bluestar, you must appoint a deputy." She mewed.

"I can't." She hissed, not moving a muscle.

"You must." Hissed Waterlily. She felt like her patience was beginning to end with her leader. "It is the warrior code." She added, a little softer this time.

Bluestar's voice strengthened, but not in acceptance. She got angrier. Waterlily didn't know how much more anger could fill Bluestar's mind. "I can't."

Waterlily tensed up all of her muscles and took a deep breath. "I can tell you who to choose." She urged. "I know who should be your next deputy."

Bluestar scrambled to her feet. She looked utterly defeated by her wounds and fear. Waterlily hesitated for a moment. She did know who should be deputy. Whitestorm would be perfect, but then she glanced over at Fireheart sitting silently by her side. His head was hung low and she knew he shared Bluestar's sympathy. Her eyes widened and she knew immediately that StarClan would tell her Fireheart is to become deputy.

Bluestar padded slowly up onto the highrock. Her legs stiffened and she began shaking. The cats were already out into the clearing. Waterlily and Fireheart sat a few tail-lengths behind the highrock. They exchanged worry glances at one another. Moon high had already passed and it was already almost sun high when she finally decided what must be done.

"Cats of ThunderClan." Her voice was shaken and a little cracked. "I must appoint a new deputy. Fireheart. You are the only cat I trust." She paused for a moment, then shook her head. She did not want to say the words honoring StarClan. "He is your new deputy."